

IS CROSSING THE LoC A FEASIBLE OPTION?

DAY

Heartwarming
stories of ordinary,
unknown Indians
who're trying
to do their bit
for the soldiers
fighting on
the front

people's war

Preeti Bhalla lives in New Delhi. Every evening, she visits all her neighbours to collect the day's newspapers. She then takes the newspapers to the nearest *kabariwallah* to sell them. The money is collected and sent to the Army Welfare Fund

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The Kargil conundrum

Can India afford to cross the Line of Control?

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Chopstick diplomacy

Sino-Indian relations turn over a new leaf



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Battle for heights

The Kargil stand-off between India and Pakistan is turning out to be a diplomatic end-de-sac (*When will the war end?*, 20-26 June). What's more, neither India nor Pakistan is ready to relent.

The LoC had been delineated in 1972 and the two nations had signed on the

detailed set of 19 maps on which the agreement was reached. Pakistan has never questioned the validity of the LoC in the last 27 years. But today, it's behaving in an odd manner. Clearly, Pakistan has definite military designs in mind before intruding the Indian side of the LoC.

Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh has correctly pointed out that India is ready to continue with the military offensive until the status quo is restored. As for India, it has indicated that it is prepared to wait as long as it takes to root out the Pakistan Army-backed infiltrators from Kargil.

Bimal Chaudhury, Calcutta (West Bengal)

■ Since the US made it clear that it believed India's version that Pakistan has violated the LoC in Kargil, Sartaz

Jaswant Singh: taking a tough stand

Aziz seems to be on the back foot. From the beginning, Pakistan foreign minister's initiative to negotiate with his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh over the Kargil conflict has ulterior motives.

Pakistan's plan to form a joint working group over the border issue is a ploy to abrogate the Simla Agreement. Pakistan's gameplan is to harp that Kashmir is the core issue and talks must focus around it. But Jaswant Singh's categorical statement that the talks are meant to discuss only Pakistan intrusions deserves praise.

Kiran Trehan, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Sheer jealousy

This refers to the story *Tenants, not squatters* (16-22 May). The charge made by the Congress that the BJP is exceeding its limits as a caretaker government, is open to question. It's the Congress which brought down the Vajpayee government in connivance with Jayalalitha and subsequently failed to provide an alternative government.

Again, it is the Congress which pressed for elections in September out of fear that if polls were held earlier, the BJP would cash in on the sympathy factor. And now, the Congress wants the BJP to remain as a lame duck government. The Congress's relentless criticism of the BJP government shows that the former wants to have the cake and eat it too.

When a government is in office, it has to act and perform. If political dividends accrue to the party in power, it cannot be helped. Didn't the Congress put up with various measures and steps taken by the Gujral government, after it was pulled down?

L. Rohini, Tiruchy (Tamil Nadu)

Setting the trend

Tamil Nadu always brings out surprises contrary to the national trend (*Trend specific*, 6-12 June). The state politicians were the first in national politics to set regional parties and for giving power to the backwards. Subsequently, in coalition politics they also mastered the art of number game to foist and bring down governments. This soon began to reflect in national politics.

In the last general elections, the AIADMK allied with the BJP in Tamil Nadu. Presently, the AIADMK and the DMK have exchanged places. But the difference is that the new combination is going to the polls as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with a national agenda, driving communal colour and promising protection to minorities. Could this be another trendsetter leading to a two-party system? (like the UDF and LDF in Kerala)

A. Jacob Sahayam, Vellore (Tamil Nadu)

Himalayan blunder

Pakistan's undeclared war on India and the subsequent fallout on both sides conclusively proves the oft-repeated truth: both Pakistan and India pursue principles diametrically opposite to each other and that the twain shall never (*Can India and Pakistan ever be friends?*, 6-12 June). The intrusion in the Kargil sector is a deliberate military venture on the part of Pakistan to bring up the Kashmir issue.

Our military intelligence and RAW certainly failed to detect the infiltration. It seems, the preparation for intrusion must have been



going on for the last one year and as such the setbacks at Kargil reflect the miserable standard of our intelligence mechanism.

To add insult to injury, we have a modern V.K. Krishna Menon in the guise of George Fernandes, a man who opens his wide mouth when he is expected to shut up. The Opposition parties are bound to make this as an issue in the next elections but till then they should bury the hatchet and aim at expelling the intruders. Pakistan's treachery and crime shouldn't go unpunished. And all political parties should unite and act as one patriotic nation to achieve the goal

U.S. Iyer, Bangalore (Karnataka)

A soldiers' minister

George Fernandes deserves kudos for creating confidence, trust and high spirit amongst our defence



George Fernandes: standing by his men

personnel by visiting Siachen and other forward areas (*A soldier's story*, 13-19 June)

Possibly, Fernandes's experience in trade unionism has helped in better management of our defence services. But there is one advice for our Raksha Mantri

please provide better weapons and aircrafts for our defence forces.

B.N. Bose, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Living in a fool's paradise

Coming shortly after the bus diplomacy and the Lahore Declaration, the armed intrusion into Kargil by Pakistan was nothing short of treachery (*Battle for Kargil*, 6-12 June). In fact, the bus diplomacy was only a charade and it was nothing but a calculated attempt at catching us off guard to literally stab us behind our back.

Perhaps, we're paying the price for our repeated political upheavals in the country. And V.K. Grover, in the story *Peacemakers proved wrong*, has hit the nail on the head when he wrote that we had been living in a fool's paradise for far too long.

True, we've been under the illusion that diplomatic peace overtures were enough to strengthen Indo-Pak bilateral relations. Our gullibility has cost us dear and it's about time we learnt from our past mistakes.

Nalini Sudhakaran, Trivandrum (Kerala)



Aparna Sen: nation's pride

Reach out

This refers to the story (*Double role*, 30 May-6 June). It's creditable that Aparna Sen is performing both behind and in front of camera in *Paromita ek din*. As a great admirer and fan of Sen, I think it's highly wrong on her part to limit her creation to regional level. In fact, by doing so, she is depriving the nation of witnessing the work and performance of a very talented film personality. I insist that she must come out of her regional shell and perform on a nation-

al level like Shabana Azmi. As an enlightened, progressive artist and an intellectual in her own right, she should not block her own path to be a national figure.

Onkar Chopra, Ludhiana (Punjab)

Royalty remains

The days of the Maharajas may seem to be a thing of the past, but by looking deeply into Indian politics one can find that the concept of royalty exists in a different way (*All in the family*, 30 May-5 June). Political power gives the politician and their kith and kin to act like royals. If Farooq Abdullah and his mother Begum Akbar Jahan further their interests through deft manoeuvrings, so also do other politicians in the country.

For instance, DMK chief M. Karunanidhi is grooming his son to be the next chief of DMK and possibly the next chief minister. NTR groomed many of his relations in a similar fashion. In Kerala Congress too, Karunakaran has done the same thing for his son. It is unintelligible why it is too difficult for the Nehru family to keep themselves away from power even after five decades.

S. Halan, Ithalar (Tamil Nadu)

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

PRIZE: RS.5000 FOR CONTRIBUTIONS



Javed Akhtar
Lyricist



Jaifram Ramesh
Politician

Contributed by Sadhana Dasgupta, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

LISTED: Azim Premji, Wipro chairman, as the richest Indian in the world by *Forbes* magazine. With an estimated personal worth of US\$ 2.8 billion, he has pushed last year's number one Lakshmi Mittal to the second place.

CHOSEN: Nizam Sethi, Pakistani journalist, for the 1999 Amnesty International 'special award for human rights journalism under threat'. However, the owner and editor of *The Friday Times*, wasn't allowed to leave the country to receive the award.

APPOINTED: Shahana Azmi, actress and

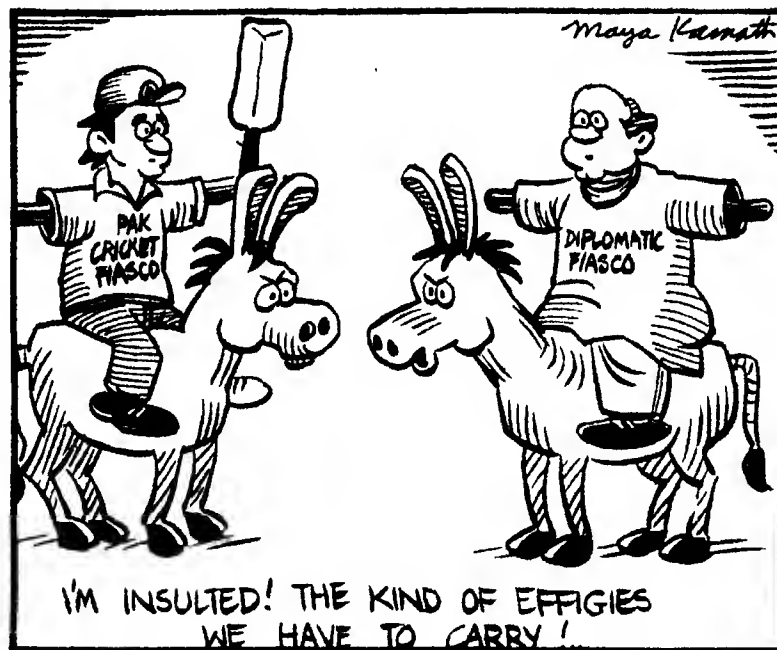


activist, as the United Nations Population Fund's goodwill ambassador for India.

DONATED: by Arundhati Roy, writer, the entire proceeds of her Rs 15-lakh Booker Prize money to the Narmada Bachao Andolan for providing relief to families displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Project.

ELECTED: Giridhar Gamang, Orissa CM, from the tribal constituency of Laxmipur. He defeated BJD candidate Bibhisan Majhi in the Assembly by-poll which had become a prestige issue for the ruling Congress.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAENAH THE ASIAN AGE

■ I can see in your face the desire for martyrdom. It is a message of determination for the whole nation.

NAWAZ SHARIF, Prime Minister of Pakistan, while addressing troops at Gultari, seven kilometres from the LoC

■ We've done some good work but a lot more needs to be done. There is no place for complacency.

JYOTI BASU, West Bengal CM, on the Left Front government's 22 years

■ Wait for some more time. We have not opened the Pandora's Box yet.

P. A. SANGMA, Nationalist Congress Party leader and ex Lok Sabha Speaker, on his party's plans for the coming polls



■ We want peace, but this time we have to ensure that peace rests on our strength.

ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE, Prime Minister

■ No bombs would go off in Tamil Nadu in future.

S. A. BASHA, chief of the outlawed Al-Ummfa and prime accused in the February 1998 Coimbatore serial blasts case, renouncing terrorism

■ We democratised the diamonds and made it available to the common man.

P. S. PANDYA, chairman, Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council, on the spurt in exports

■ This is my world. That's why I've come back to it.

RAJESH KHANNA, ex-superstar, on his return to films

SEEN

SONIA IN VARANASI

What really happened that afternoon



SPELLBOUND: *the crowd listens with rapt attention*

The old city of Benaras was all set for the rally. You could sense the mood. Posters of Sonia Gandhi and local Congress leaders adorned the city walls. Congress flags fluttered in the breeze. Party workers, in starched white *kurtas*, looked busy, almost frenetic. The security was tight; you could see policemen perched on rooftops, their guns pointed threateningly downwards. And the roads had been cleared at least an hour before Sonia Gandhi's arrival.

In the sweltering afternoon heat, local bigwigs delivered speeches to near-empty grounds. Sonia Gandhi hadn't yet arrived and the crowd wasn't yet interested. Better to conserve energy for the big moment *Soniaji ki bhashan*. Wiser still to look for a space in the shade.

It was different inside the VIP enclosure where people literally scrambled for the 'front seats'. Up on the dais, the speakers droned on, trying to build up the tempo. "*Soniaji humare desh ki bahu... Gandhi parivar... Rajivji... Indiraji...*" Stock phrases, same old stuff, but you can't deny — after a while you are bound to react. And slowly and surely, the numbers began to swell as more Congress workers reached the venue. More banners and louder slogans. The excitement was beginning to mount.

As the time for Sonia Gandhi's arrival approached, one Congress worker went overboard talking about the 'Arrival'. He went on and on till she finally arrived.

What an entry! The whole place seemed to explode

in excitement. Slogans rent the air. People craned their necks, the shorter ones on tiptoe, for a better view. One wave from the lady and the crowd went into a frenzy. More slogans, a few more speeches by the leaders of the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee and then, at last, the speech that every single person in the crowd had been waiting for.

Sonia Gandhi delivered her speech with confidence and in impeccable Hindi. Soon after she started speaking, one man sitting in the VIP enclosure dialled a number on his mobile and said, "Sun rahi ho..." He kept the mobile on for a few minutes so that the person on the other end could also hear the speech!

The speech ended almost as soon as it began. But what a transformation! Gone was the initial disinterest of the public. They had come to listen to the Congress president speak. And they had heard her speak. Afterwards, there was a massive traffic jam, but the air was still charged. Even the presswallahs were impressed by her speech. "At least she speaks better than Deve Gowda," said one.

Clearly, Sonia Gandhi had made an impression. Because, the next morning, locals were still discussing the rally. They weren't sure whether her speech would get the Congress more votes. But they were all praise for one man — "*Soniaji ki guru ne bahut mehnat ki hai*". •

Parnmeet Shergill/Varanasi

**People craned their necks, the shorter ones on tiptoe, for a better view.
One wave from the lady and the crowd went into a frenzy**

Who next for Pr

Evaluating the contenders



Now that the stupid argument over her foreign origins has been drained of all that either side has to say, the focus is being shifted to the relative merits of Sonia Gandhi and Atal Behari Vajpayee for Prime Minister. The argument is, in an important sense, misplaced because ours is not a presidential system. In the United States, it is valid to ask: Bush or Gore? It is for one or the other that each

voter casts his ballot. It is the electorate who decide who will be the President

In our system, the voter has no say in who will be PM. The names of Vajpayee and Sonia will appear only on the ballot papers of the constituencies in which they will be contesting. Indeed, even without contesting, either could become PM. Vajpayee's symbol, the Lotus, will figure in less than half the constituencies of the country, the Hand symbol on many more. There will be a large number of constituencies where the voter will neither see the Lotus nor the Hand. Tamil Nadu is a case in point: only a minority of the constituencies are likely to see either symbol on the ballot paper, in only a tiny fraction, if any, will both symbols be seen.

At the end of the counting, a mathematical addition rather than a uniform exercise of the same choice in each booth will determine who has the majority in the Lok Sabha. If neither side has, then the President will invite the larger entity to take a shot at forming the government. The individual to be called will be elected not by the electorate but by the parliamentary party. And whether the largest or next largest entity succeeds in securing the confidence of the House will, in such a contingency, depend on how and where the uncommitted decide to throw in their lot.

ALL OF WHICH means that the most basic requirement of the parliamentary system is the ability of the contenders to secure on their own, or in combination with others, a majority of the seats in the Lok Sabha. Personal characteristics are secondary. It is political influence that is decisive. The popularity of the party or alliance they represent will be the single-most important factor determining who will be Prime Minister.

The other characteristic of the parliamentary system which seems to be forgotten by those who treat elections as a kind of beauty contest between two rival leaders is that while the presidential system leads to the election of one of the contending candidates as the all-powerful President, the parliamentary system throws up a Prime Minister who is no more than a "first among equals". It is an entire front bench that takes office. And, unlike the presidential system, it is not the President who chooses his Cabinet from among anyone who is not a



A.B. Vajpayee

Will the electorate vote for a Atal Behari/Ab ki

member of Parliament. In the parliamentary system, the Prime Minister has to choose his or her government from among only those who are MPs, for it is only MPs who can become ministers. Thus the choice is not between two Prime Ministers but between two governments. The Congress front bench—consisting of veterans of virtually every department of government—will be pitted against a coalition whose experience lies in Opposition much more than in government.

This is the consequence of the Congress having been in office for 45 of the last 52 years of Independence. In that sense, it is the natural party of governance. The alliance led by the BJP, on the other hand, is an amalgam of those who have spent but seven of the last 52 years in government. Seven years which have seen seven Prime Ministers, none of whom completed

ime Minister?



Sonia Gandhi

ircus or a sarkar? Pichli bari ari bahu hamari!

his term. Indeed, only one crossed two years and one — the latest — squeaked through by a month beyond the *barsi*. In that sense, the BJP-led coalition is the natural party of Opposition. Inexperience leads to immaturity, immaturity to incompetence: the electorate will be deciding whether 13 months of Atal Behari have been 13 months of inspiration, innovation, dynamism — or bumbling incoherence compounded by interminable internal strife.

THE NEXT QUESTION which is bound to weigh with the electorate is not the ability of the Prime Minister to perform, but of the Prime Minister's capacity to carry his team with him — or her, as the case might be. On the one hand, is a leader who has just demonstrated her iron grip on her party

On the other is a leader whose personal standing has not forestalled or curtailed 13 months of debilitating squabbles with every ally, beginning with the single-most important pre-poll partner, the AIADMK, and ending with the oldest pre-poll partner, the Haryana Vikas Party of Chaudhury Bansi Lal, a partnership that dates back not to 1998 but to the elections of 1996. In between, there have been blazing rows with virtually every partner, a kind of World Cup of Politics: BJP vs Akali Dal; BJP vs Trinamul; BJP vs Lok Shakti; BJP vs Telugu Desam; BJP vs Samata; BJP vs Shiv Sena; BJP vs Chautala's Lok Dal. Of course, these spectacular battles have been nothing compared to the second league matches: BJP vs RSS; BJP vs Swadeshi Jagran Manch; BJP vs Bharatiya Mazdoor Sabha (Dattopant Thengadi); BJP vs Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad; BJP vs Vishwa Hindu Parishad; BJP vs Hindu Jagran Manch; BJP vs Bajrang Dal. And, of course, the bitterest of them all: BJP vs BJP. Captain A.B. Vajpayee, vice-captain Pramod Mahajan in the first eleven, vs Captain L.K. Advani, vice-captain Sushma Swaraj, in the second eleven.

Will the electorate vote for a circus or a *sarkar*? *Pichli bari Atal Behari/Ab ki bari bahu hamari!*

After stability comes ability. How much ability resides in a man who, by his own confession, took a bus to Lahore and got off at Kargil? Why was there no military or intelligence assessment made of the consequences of the bear hug in Lahore? Why was it not anticipated that the obvious soft target was the northern salient of the LoC — precisely because, as Vajpayee helplessly points out, it has not been seriously violated in 22 years? Why was it not anticipated that with the sealing off of the passes along the western alignment of the LoC, it is the Kargil sector that would next be targeted? Did the government think the Lahore Declaration had ended the struggle for Siachen? If not, why did they not plan to secure the neighbouring Kargil sector from Pak attempts at cutting off Indian supply lines to Siachen? Has the Leh-Kargil highway not been the object of intense shelling for years? Were the security implications of the stepped up shelling of the highway immediately on its opening this warm season investigated, examined and assessed? If not, why not?

WHEN DID FIRST reports come in of infiltration? In early April, as suggested by defence analyst Maj Gen (Retd) Afsar Karim? By January, as told to the Congress team which recently visited Kargil? By August-September last year as indicated by former foreign secretary and National Security Council member, J.N. Dixit (who, from an exaggerated sense of propriety has, I understand, put in his papers, anything not to have to go the L.C. Jain/Salman Haider way)? If none of these, then when? How was the first information received evaluated? What steps were taken to counter the enemy? How tardy was the response? How adequate was it to the occasion? Why was the Chief of Army Staff ordered out of the country on a goodwill mission after it was known that the LoC had been massively violated? Why did the Raksha Mantri leave

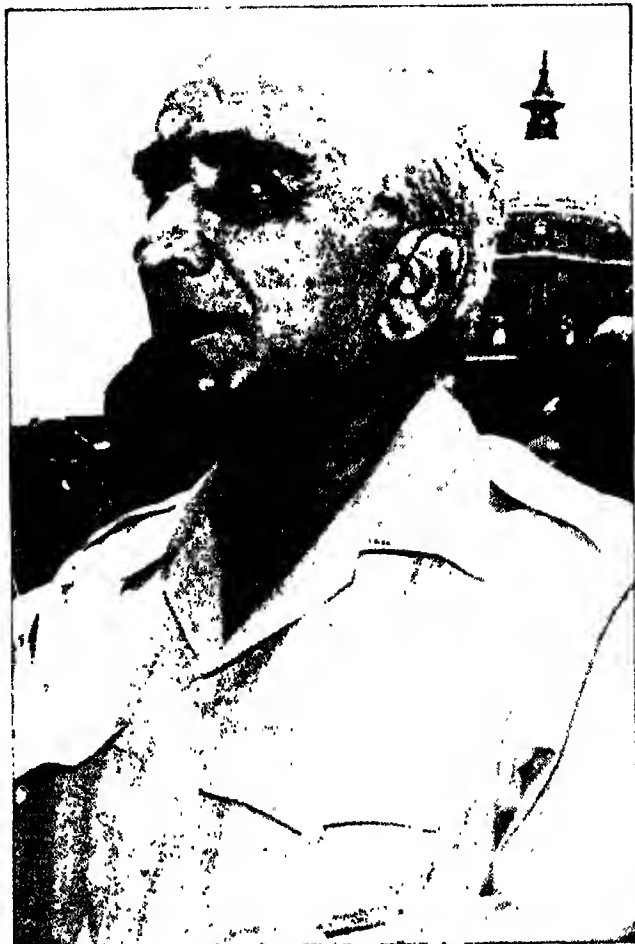
town for personal celebrations when the country was faced with this unprecedented challenge? How long was the gap between the government having confirmed information about the violations and sharing it with the country at large? Days? Weeks? Months? And is it enough to transfer a colonel and a brigadier for the lapses? Does the Raksha Mantri share none of the blame?

Were any orders sent out on the eve of Lahore, or its aftermath, to make an intelligence evaluation of the situation all along the length of the LoC? If not, why not? Was the army instructed to keep a close watch on the snow? Is it true that light snowfall facilitated the intrusion? If so, why were our troops not moved forward earlier? Why was it not understood that the snows would melt for the Pakistanis on their side of the LoC at the same rate as on our side? Were our troops equipped to meet the challenge? Is it true that the few suppliers in Europe had received massive orders for snow warfare clothing, boots and equipment months ago? Were these orders from Pakistan? Why did we not know anything about these purchases? If we did, then why did we not put two and two together? Have these bulk purchases by Pakistan left our troops short of minimum basic requirements? If so, who is to blame? And what is the Raksha Mantri's constructive or contributory responsibility for this disaster?

ON WHAT BASIS did the National Security Adviser and the PM's principal secretary, Brajesh Mishra, and then the defence minister conclude that the Pakistan Prime Minister, the Pakistan government and the ISI were not in the know of what was happening in Kargil? Why, if this were so, has the Government of India now objected to the Pakistan government's refusal to accept responsibility for the intrusions? What was the purpose of Jaswant Singh personally presiding over the release of the tapes of conversations between senior armed forces personnel of Pakistan? Was it not to underline the Pakistan government's helplessness at the machinations of the Pak Army, as claimed by PMO and the defence minister? If so, does the Government of India agree with the Government of Pakistan that the latter is innocent of any wrongdoing? If not, what was the point of the tapes drama? And, incidentally, from where did the government get the tapes? From its own sources? Then are the Chinese happy with our bugging their hotel rooms? Oh, not from our sources but the CIA? If so, have we established a relationship with the United States for intelligence gathering? How does this square with non-alignment? Or have we given that up too?

Is there a security threat from China? To begin at the beginning, did the Raksha Mantri say China was Enemy No. One? If he did not, did he in fact say China was Potential Enemy No. One? And did not the Prime Minister, in his letter to President Clinton after Pokhran-II, identify the Chinese Bomb as the proximate cause of our aspiring to nuclear weapons status? And did not the Raksha Mantri, in defence of what he said or

How long was the gap between the government having confirmed information about LoC violations and sharing it with the country at large? Days? Weeks? Months? And is it enough to transfer a colonel and a brigadier for the lapses? Does the Raksha Mantri share none of the blame?



JASWANT SINGH: The external affairs minister declared in Beijing that there is no threat at all, absolutely none, from China. Do the Chinese think Jaswant is the most naive innocent to tread the carpet up the stairs to the first floor of South Block? Or are they wondering what the shiftiest Indian government they have ever had to deal with now has up its sleeve?

did not say, cite in defence of himself in Parliament lengthy extracts from previous defence ministry reports? How then does one reconcile all this with the external affairs minister declaring in Beijing that there is no threat at all, absolutely none, from China? Do the Chinese think Jaswant is the most gullible creature they have ever met, the most naive innocent to tread the carpet up the stairs to the first floor of South Block? Or are they wondering what the shiftiest Indian government they have ever had to deal with now has up its sleeve? Or are they, in despair, praying to the God they don't believe in to set things right Come September?

And that curious offer of safe passage? If it was an off-the-cuff response by George to a passing correspondent's question, then why did the Prime Minister see fit to justify it at his level? And why has the government now revoked the offer? Is flip the answer to flop? And if George has said nothing wrong, then why has he been asked to shut up? And if he has not been ordered to close his trap, why is his party general secretary speaking for him? Not just on party matters but defence matters? Has Jaya Jaitley picked up the trick from Niloufer Bhagwat? *O tempora! O mores!* •



PEOPLE'S WAR

"We can't go there and fight. So we're doing all we can to help those who are fighting for us"

• A Delhi-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) told a newspaper reporter that one way of helping the *jawans* fighting in Kargil could be for households to donate pickle and jam — the NGO would arrange for these bottles to reach the *jawans*. The story appeared in the newspaper the next day.

Overnight, a queue formed outside the offices of the NGO. Its telephone lines were jammed with calls, some asking if, in addition to pickle, they would accept butter and cheese as well. Finally, the NGO had to take its phone off the hook and an exasperated PRO of the army told callers that the Indian Army had enough jam and pickle and had no need of any more.

When the flood of jam and pickle bottles still didn't stop, Zee TV did a programme explaining to viewers what the armed forces could use and what they couldn't, and how to make sure contributions reached the right destination.

• In Bangalore, chemists in the Thyagarajanagar, a lower middle class locality, called a meeting of their association and decided to close their shops for one day to mourn the death of the soldiers in Kargil. They did a day-long collection, put together Rs 10,000 and sent it to the victims of war.

• Sumita Walia, who lives in Vikaspuri, a lower middle class colony in Delhi, persuaded residents in her colony to forego one meal a day, and announced she would collect the *dals* and vegetables and have it sent to the *jawans* in Kargil. On realising that may be this wasn't feasible, she and her friends decided to do a collection and sent it to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.

• Pushpa Chaturvedi, a resident of Delhi's Mayur Vihar,



K.P.S. Gill observed that in Punjab hundreds of policemen lost their lives battling an enemy essentially Pakistani in origin. But these heroes, who fought as bravely in a war that was less conspicuous, left behind only weeping wives and children. No one remembers them today

organises a weekly *kertan* in her locality. Last week, she said she was going to put up a banner asking for money for Kargil victims. "*Lekin aap batayen, yeh paisa kahan bhejna hai Times of India Fund mein to keval Rs 2,000 se adhik acknowledge kiya jata hai. Yadi ham log har ghar se Rs 21 bhi ikatthi karen to achhi rashi jama to sakti hai* (But you tell us where we should send this money. The Times of India Fund only prints the names of those who have given more than Rs 2,000. We reckon that Rs 21 per household is a small sum of money, which won't pinch but which can add up to quite a bit. Where should we send it?)," she called SUNDAY to ask.

- A powerloom owner in Bhiwandi, Maharashtra, decided to marry his daughter simply and saved Rs 5 lakh. The money was donated to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.
- Bakeinan's Industries, a confectionary company which produces biscuits, has arranged for 20 tonnes of biscuits, costing Rs 10 lakh to be sent to the Kargil *jawans*.
- The Tamil Nadu government, alarmed at the sudden mushrooming of fraudulent organisations purporting to collect money for the *jawans* in Kargil, has put huge advertisements in Tamil newspapers, warning people against conmen.

The advertisements ask people to donate money only to the PM's Relief Fund, the Army Welfare Fund or the chief minister's fund.

- "These children are not happy with what they've done," says John Vincent, administrator of the Bishop Cotton School in Bangalore, which organised a walk and collected Rs 2 lakh in two days. "The children keep asking what more we can do. Everyone, even the sweepers in the school, came forward with generous contributions."

A blood donation camp in the school elicited an amazing response. "So what if I'm not at the front? I can still give my blood," said a little boy preparing to donate blood.

- Citizens of Ludhiana opened counters at the Ludhiana railway station, offering water, cold drinks and fruit to any train which had an army bogie attached to it. Ludhiana is the hub of railway movement to and from Kargil. The counters are manned round the clock.

- In Calcutta, even otherwise a city where blood donation is a public service, hundreds of blood donation camps are being held to give to the army.

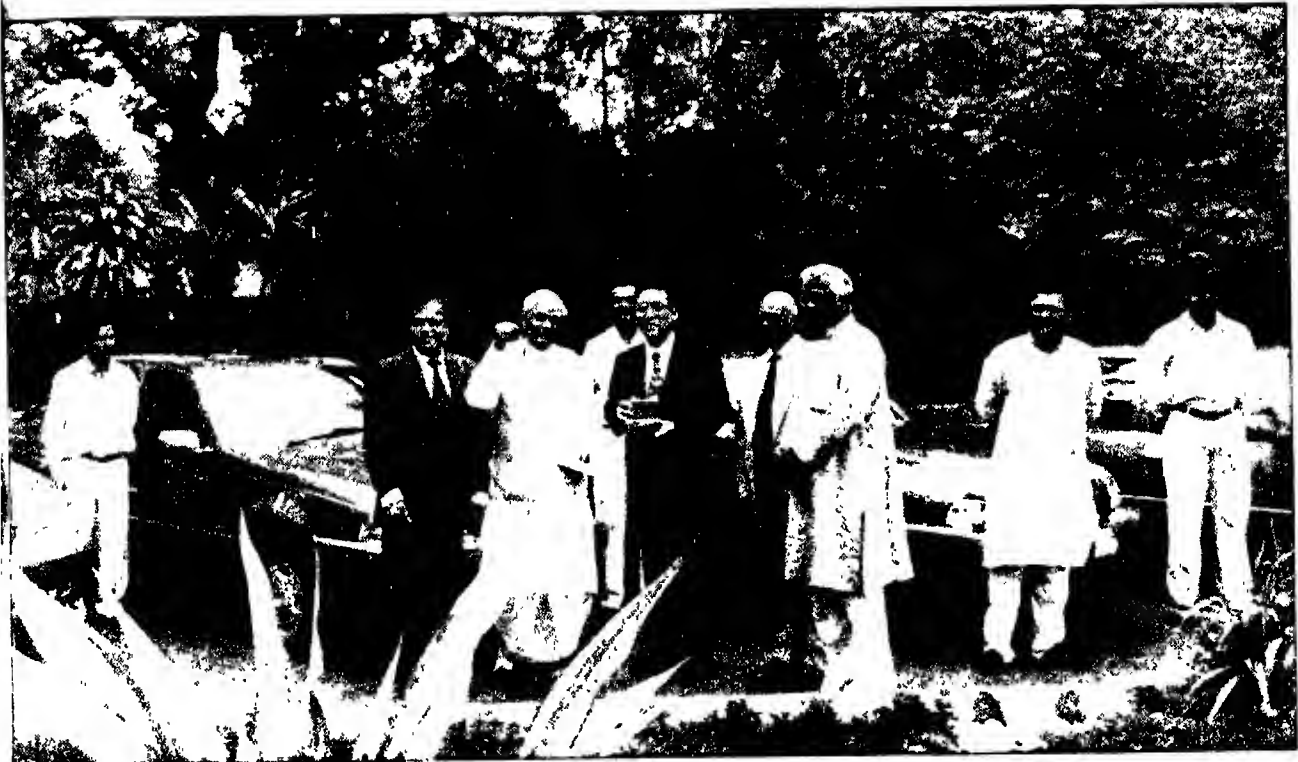
- In Bangalore, campaign to collect funds for Kargil victims has become an event, to be managed by even management companies. "My company has been approached by a lot of clients expressing concern at what is happening in Kargil and wondering how they can help," says Prithvi Banvasi. So Banvasi and his friends got together to organise a Walk of Life. "We are helping companies and individuals in collecting money which we will donate, not just to any 'fund' but the families of those who have lost members, or those who have been injured. We are compiling addresses and we will send this money with the name and best wishes of the person making the contribution," Banvasi says.

- Sampatraj Muniswamy is a convict in the Bangalore Central Jail. He was a constable of the military police and has been convicted for killing a fellow constable. He is 6 ft 4 inch tall and jogs 5 km every day. He wants to be sent to the Line of Control. He doesn't care if he dies killing the enemy. Out of his earnings in jail, he has donated Rs 1,000 to the Kargil Relief Fund.

What began as a trickle has turned into an avalanche. Everyone wants to give — money, clothes, jewellery, anything — to reach out and touch those who're fighting on the front. The endeavour of those who can afford to give — corporate houses, industrialists, car manufacturers, employees donating a day's salary, newspapers — is remarkable. But more remarkable is the effort of those who count their pennies and have to give up something to spare something for the *jawan*.

And when charity is depleted and done with, comes the anger. At the Wall of Letters — a meeting place for children, the elderly and anyone who wants to send a message to Kargil at Delhi's India Gate — there was rage as well as helplessness. A six-year-old boy, Arush Mitra, lifted a tiny cricket bat wrapped in white paper. The paper said, "Pakis, with this bat, I will beat you." L. Khurana, a retired English teacher in a government school whose son is fighting in Kashmir, said: "I'm here to bless the soldiers. We're waiting for you to win and come back to us. Your sacrifice won't go to waste."

A six-year-old boy, Arush Mitra, hefted a tiny cricket bat wrapped in white paper. The paper said: "Pakis, with this bat, I will beat you"



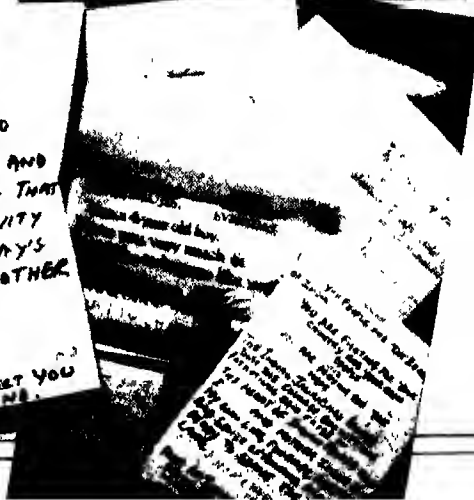
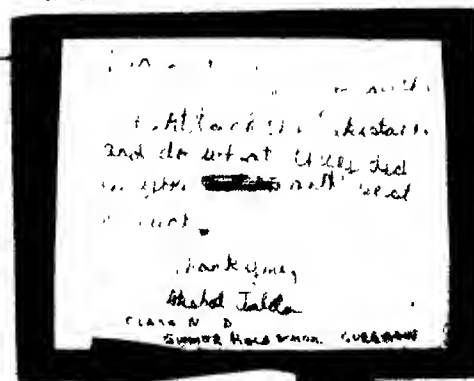
Six Cielos being handed over to A.B. Vajpayee and George Fernandes by Daewoo officials

Letters written to Indian soldiers in Kargil by ordinary citizens

YOU PEOPLE ARE THE REAL PRIDE OF INDIA
YOU ARE FIGHTING FOR YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR OWN PEOPLE

ARE PRAYING FOR YOU HERE
"AMMA, MHA, PACHED
THE COURAGE, BRAVITY AND
THIS SEEM TO EXIST IN
THE HEART OF INDIAN PEOPLE AND
AND MOTHER INDIA THAT
I MY OWN LIFE, COURAGE, BRAVITY
AND SENCE OF PATRIOTISM ALWAYS
READY TO SERVE THE MOTHER
LAND

FROM AN INDIAN WE
NITIN JAIN. RESPECT YOU
JAI HIND.



Swarnalata Seshadri came from a residential colony at least 40 km away from India Gate, "out of love and respect for our soldiers". A group of young men read out the messages they wanted sent to the soldiers. "Pakistan ki chutti karn hai (finish Pakistan)," one said. Another said "Ek ek ka badla lenge (we will take revenge for each one we've lost)."

The problem is in handling all of this. Till a few months ago, India was trying to be friends with Pakistan. Now emotion against Pakistan is pouring forth, making those who still believe India and Pakistan can be friends, wince and cringe at this outpouring of anti-Pakistan anger. Is there a politically correct way of dealing with patriotism? Must patriotism only assert itself when there is an enemy?

In an article last week, former Punjab Police chief K.P.S. Gill made roughly the same point. In Punjab, hundreds of policemen lost their lives battling an enemy which was essentially Pakistan in origin. It is now established beyond doubt that Sikh militants were trained and motivated by the ISI in Pakistan. But these heroes, who fought as bravely in a war that was less conspicuous, left



A coffin containing the body of a dead Indian soldier

behind only weeping wives and children. No one remembers them today

The answer lies in the way the notion of patriotism has been constructed in India. From the days of Independence movement, patriotism has been seen as a part of a discourse which recognises *sacrifice* as the ultimate virtue

Germany and Japan are two nations which were devastated by a post Industrial Revolution war, which meant that they had to reconstruct their nations from scratch. In both countries, work and more work became a metaphor for sacrifice and nationalism.

Now that the Kargil war has become a people's war, why can't India find other ways of exhibiting patriotism? In Hamburg, the small industrial town in Germany, 40 per cent of which was destroyed in the Second World War, industrial production increased by 60 per cent in the year after the bombing because the people were fuelled by the cause: they wanted to rebuild Germany and restore it to its former glory. It is another matter that this call was given by the National Socialists. But it was the dogged com-

mitment to the work ethic that reestablished Germany as one of the world's leading industrial powers

Instead of donating a day's salary, why can't trade unions and political parties call upon employees to put in an extra hour at work for the Kargil cause? Why can't telephone operators manning telephone enquires resolve that they will be extra polite for one hour every day out of consideration for the *jawans*? Why can't passport officers work an hour extra stamping passports in recognition of the fact that the *jawans* are working 24 hours a day? Why can't priests and *pujaris* in temples, who fleece poor devotees, announce that they

will only collect token *dakshina* and send up an extra prayer for the *jawans*? Surely that's the next most patriotic thing to do if you can't go to fight on the Front?

But then that's always been India's problem — that its leadership hasn't been able to lead in times of emotional crises. The Congress is bickering about whether the Rajya Sabha should be convened or not. The ADMK believes all India's problems will be resolved if the defence minister is sacked. The BJP is preoccupied with the diplomatic moves it can make to win world approval.

But the people of India want the feel-good placebo of 'doing something' for the war. Why aren't political parties responding to this yearning by offering ways of redefining patriotism?

The great danger is that if the vanguard doesn't step in, the thin line between patriotism and jingoism will be breached forever. Then it will never be possible to get India and Pakistan to become friends. •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore, Kaajal Walla/Bombay, Sreedhar Pillai/Madras, Garima Kalra/New Delhi with Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi

**From the days of
Independence
movement, patriotism
has been seen as a part
of a discourse which
recognises *sacrifice* as
the ultimate virtue**

The politics of



• Congress president Sonia Gandhi donates blood for the soldiers in Kargil. As photographers click away, Congressmen whisper gleefully: "This will put the foreigner issue to rest. How can you question the patriotism of someone giving blood for the nation?"

• The BJP takes out half-page advertisements, declaring 23 June — the death anniversary of Shyama Prasad Mookerjee — as Kashmir Day. The copy of the advertisement tells the reader two things: that Dr Mookerjee was the founder-president of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. And that he died in prison after "courting arrest to demand the full integration of Kashmir with India".

The advertisement also says that the BJP-led government is determined to drive the enemy from Indian soil. The Congress criticises the advertisement.

WAR

As soldiers fight in Kargil, politicians slug it out in New Delhi

• The Congress takes out an inflated caricature of Atal Behari Vajpayee's bus to Lahore. Only, this bus lists its destination as Delhi-Lahore-Kargil. And Congressmen joke about parallels between the Lahore bus and Delhi's kil-

ler Blue Line buses

Vajpayee acknowledges publicly that he was betrayed by the gesture in Lahore. Another advertisement appears in newspapers criticising the Congress for playing with balloons while soldiers are

Sonia Gandhi donating blood for army men in Kargil

Acca No. 26974 Date 1.6.2000

dying in Kargil. The Congress withdraws its balloon. And the BJP loses no time in pointing this out at its next press briefing.

• The Congress sends a team of observers to Kargil. The BJP fields its Prime Minister. However, a day before Vajpayee's visit, Sonia Gandhi decides to visit Srinagar. And pictures of Sonia calling on the jawans in hospital make it to the papers a day before the photograph of Vajpayee saluting the Indian soldiers at Kargil.

The Congress feels that it has won the photo opportunity round.

Suddenly the war — or the war-like situation — in Kargil has become the election issue, and all kinds of politicians are trying to capitalise on it. The Congress blames the government, and hence the BJP, for intelligence failure in not being able to detect the intruders in time.

The BJP, in turn, accuses the Congress of being anti-national; for trying to demoralise the Indian soldier. According to the BJP, there is no difference between the government and the defence forces.

But there is a difference, said the Congress president. "We support the army, but there are some questions that we would like to ask the government. However, this is not the right time to raise them," she said at her ill-fated rally in Varanasi last week.

"Separating the army from the government is real politicising. I'm extremely sorry that some political parties are trying to politicise the issue," said K. Jana Krishnamurthi, BJP vice-president. "In 1971, when Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister and the BJP was in the Opposition, we did not even have one per cent of reservation against the government in its efforts to face the Pakistani Army. But after the war was over, it was the Congress party that

exploited the success of the war to its own political advantage."

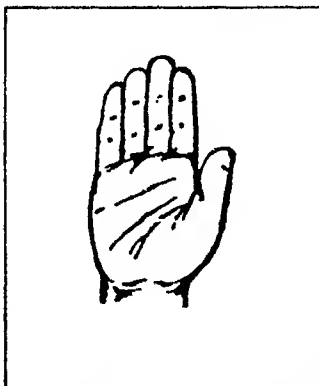
But isn't the BJP doing the same with Kargil? What about the advertisements taken out on Shiyama Prasad Mookerjee's death anniversary announcing that "the BJP-led government is determined to drive the enemy from Indian soil"? However, Jana Krishnamurthi says that the BJP has been celebrating this day as Kashmir Day ever since 1954. "And we always discuss the situation in Kashmir on this day. So this year too, our units will educate the masses on the situation in Kargil."

What he leaves unsaid, however, is that the BJP units will obviously educate the masses about Kargil in a way that shows their government in a good light. No wonder the Congress criticised the advertisements on Shiyama Prasad Mookerjee's death anniversary. "The BJP is compounding its inefficiency in government by petty politicking," denounced Pranab Mukherjee.

SPARRING PARTIES

What the Congress says:

It is an intelligence failure on part of the government. They should have been able to detect the presence of the intruders much earlier. The army, however, is not to blame. The Congress supports the military action in Kargil.



What the BJP says:

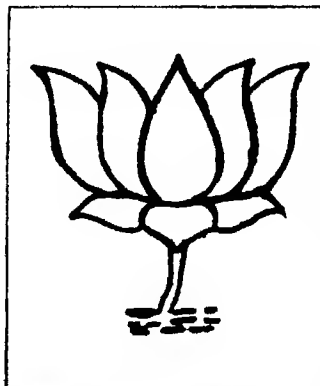
How can you differentiate between the government and the defence forces? The entire nation should back the government in its effort to protect the country. The Congress is merely playing political games.

What the Congress says:

Political instability in the country led to Kargil. The Pakistanis thought they could take advantage of the unrest in India. Isn't the government to be blamed for this?

What the BJP says:

Who caused the unrest in the first place? Wasn't it



the Congress that conspired with Jayulalitha to bring the government down?

What the Congress says:

The defence minister should take moral responsibility and step down. After all, during the war with China, it was A.B. Vajpayee, leader of Opposition at the time, who

asked for the then defence minister V.K. Krishna Menon's resignation. Why is he protecting George Fernandes now?

What the BJP says:

There is no need for Fernandes to resign. Adds Fernandes, I have not offered to resign. And besides, Krishna Menon was a friend of mine; 1962 was not his fault.

What the Congress says:

The G-8 statement is not the diplomatic victory the government is making it out to be. The statement does not even mention Pakistan by name.

But there is no denying that the Congress does not quite know how to use the situation in Kargil to its advantage. The main Opposition party has to be content with pointing to the inexperience and carelessness of the government. To say anything more could be construed as anti-national and demoralising for the armed forces. The BJP, on the other hand, by identifying with the defence forces, can take all the credit. And blame the bodybags on Pakistan.

The Congress has been quick to realise this and has tried to make a subtle distinction between the government and the Indian Army. But this did not win them many points, and Congressmen were genuinely concerned that the action in Kargil would go in the BJP's favour. That is when the party went in for a two-pronged attack. It was decided that the highest level, i.e., the party president and the general secretaries, would act as a 'responsible Opposition' and make guarded statements



"The BJP is compounding its inefficiency in government by petty politicking"

What the BJP says:

The Congress statement reads like the one issued by Islamabad. Whose side are they on?

What the Congress says:

The people of India hold the BJP responsible for the situation in Kargil. As the bodybags keep arriving in Delhi, after Pakistan, the people blame Vajpayee. The only way the BJP can turn this in their favour is whip up a fervour of patriotism — and the only way to do this is to go in for a full-fledged war with Pakistan.

What the BJP says:

When you look at green grass with red spectacles, even the greenery appear red. If we do cross the LoC, it will be because the situation demands it, and not because of some cheap political gain.

And anyway, the border dispute is not of our making. We are preparing a white paper on what successive Congress governments have done in Kashmir.

What the Congress says:

The BJP should take the Opposition into confidence. And we want a special Rajya Sabha session to discuss the issue.

What the BJP says:

The Opposition is looking for opportunities to embarrass the government. Take for example Laloo Prasad Yadav's 'most irresponsible' charge that the present PM cannot handle the situation. These are the kind of statements that will be aired at the Rajya Sabha session. Nothing concrete will come out of it.

about "raising questions at the appropriate time", and the second strata, i.e., the PCC level, should not hold back its attack on the government. "People at the grass-root level should be made to realise that it was the government's ineptitude that led to the current situation," points out a Congress working committee member. "So the PCC level will point out that the *jawans* fighting at Kargil have to make supreme sacrifices because of the government's failure to act on time. You cannot trust the BJP to preserve the territorial integrity of India," he said.

And now the Congress feels the situation has turned to its advantage. According to a party general secretary, the only way the BJP could have capitalised on the border attack was if it had flushed out the invaders within a week or so. "They can then go into the polls with a victory celebration. And for this they need time to whip up a nationalist fervour. To do so on the eve of the polls will not give them enough time," he added, pointing to the fact that Indira Gandhi had reached Lahore within 12 days.

Or else, say Congressmen, the BJP can whip up patriotic passions by going in for a full-fledged war. In fact, this is the advice that the RSS is giving the government as well (see following story). The initiative ranges from exercising the nuclear option to flexing muscle by crossing the Line of Control. But the government has to go on the offensive to capitalise on the anti-Pakistan mood of the nation," says a member of the RSS think-tank.

So, will the decision to attack Pakistan be a political or a military one? For whether they like it or not, both the Congress and the BJP have realised that the situation in Kargil is now a full-fledged election issue. Even others such as Laloo Prasad Yadav are trying to cash in on the issue. Yadav blamed the BJP for Kargil and said, "Vajpayee cannot handle the situation."

It may be a war-like situation in Kargil. But it's definitely a full-fledged war on the electoral battlefield. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

Raring to go



Prime Minister Vajpayee's government is under pressure from the RSS to take the battle to the enemy camp

Never has the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) been vindicated more triumphantly. When the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), at its state executive meeting on 27 June, vowed to "teach Pakistan a lesson in a fourth war so that it will never dare to ever attempt a Kargil again", it was the RSS speaking. India has fought three wars with Pakistan, but has always adopted a defensive stance, a kind of 'forgive-and-forget' attitude to the country. Demand for strict action from the RSS never found any appreciation.

But the Sangh now finds that its stand on Pakistan and Kashmir has been endorsed by subsequent events in Kashmir and now the armed intrusion in Kargil. Therefore, there is a general feeling in the Sangh that the Indian Army should not be restrained beyond a point, on the issue of crossing the LoC into Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

The Sangh is not convinced with arguments that diplomatic efforts alone are enough to silence Pakistan. At the recently-concluded training camps of the RSS known as the OTC (Officer Training Camp), the demand to militarily rounce Pakistan and reclaim Indian territory was voiced unanimously.

What is the OTC? During the summer months every year, training camps are organised by the RSS where selected cadres are trained ideologically and physically for nearly a month. *Swayamsevak*s who attend these camps pay for themselves. There are four categories of trainees: ITC, First Year OTC, Second Year OTC, and the most important final stage of training, the Third Year OTC, which is organised in Nagpur.

This year's training camps were overshadowed by events at Kargil. Most of the lectures and deliberations revolved around nationalist efforts to defeat and give a final blow to Pakistan.



**Vajpayee with RSS leaders:
differing perceptions**



**K.S. Sudarshan: advocating
a hardline**

At first, RSS cadres and top brass were anxious about the casualties being taken by the Indian Army and there was pressure to go in for full-fledged war. But gradually, as the gains of India's diplomatic efforts sank into the RSS's consciousness, the isolation and humiliation of Pakistan made up for the losses of soldiers. The whole world realised, the RSS believed, that Pakistan had done wrong and was ready to punish it.

It helped that a few weeks ago Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, perceived by the top brass to be arrogant and dismissive of the RSS, actually paid a visit to the Sangh office and spent more than an hour with the leaders. The Sangh has also noted that he was directly deliberating and frequently exchanging views and opinions with the RSS — his directive to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to keep in constant touch with the Sangh headquarters has been well received by the organisation.

There is no doubt that Vajpayee, in the past, has played a major role in moderating the RSS view towards Pakistan. As foreign minister during the Janata regime (1977-79) and his Lahore trip during his prime ministership led the Sangh to recognise that Pakistan was a nation state,

here to stay. Significantly, though few people noticed it, the Sangh moderated its concept of Akhand Bharat.

This was very important. The Sangh was unforgiving to those who partitioned India. The Jana Sangh said in its manifesto: "It shall be an objective of Jana Sangh policies to end the separation of India and Pakistan and bring the two together." The Jana Sangh opposed the Shimla Agreement as being too conciliatory towards Pakistan and its slogan was "Desh na hara, Fauj na hari, hari hai sarkar hamari" (It was neither the country nor the army which lost the (1972) war. If anyone lost, it was our government).

Yet, Akhand Bharat was played down in the RSS agenda largely because of Vajpayee's exertions. The RSS could not be persuaded to change its mind that Pakistan was India's friend. But it cautiously accepted that Vajpayee had managed to turn the table in regional politics in south Asia by extending the hand of friendship to Pakistan. Whether it was Lahore or other conciliatory gestures, the RSS asked India to watch its back. K.S. Sudarshan, the *sah karwah* declared, "The hate-India campaign is essential grist to the Pakistan mill."

Which is why it took no time at all to fan the old flames in the RSS when India was attacked. "Why must we always be on the defensive?" asked an RSS trainer. "Why should we let our soldiers be killed? Why do we have the bomb if we're never going to use it?"

It was these feelings which were reflected in the *Panchajanya* editorial last month which asked the government to give a befitting reply to Pakistan even if it is at the cost of using a missile bomb (sic) (obviously referring to the nuclear bomb). The PMO reacted to this and asked editor Tarun Vijay to clarify that he didn't mean a nuclear bomb and that his views did not represent those of the RSS, for suggestions like this would negate our efforts in international fora.

The feeling in the RSS is that it was the diplomatic victory of Vajpayee which restrained the gung-ho RSS hardliners, and in a sense, saved Vajpayee. India's body language during the visit of Sartaj Aziz to New Delhi reflected the anger and rage of the RSS.

Now the mood in the organisation is not just our posts, but also theirs. The RSS is clear that it will support to its last man the liberation of PoK. The logic is: once PoK is liberated, Pakistan would lose its claim on J&K. During the Punjab agitation, the RSS slogan was, *Yadi paurush ne lalkara hai to Nankani ki ore chalo. Khalistan kyon mangte ho, sara Hindustan tumhara hai* (If your manhood is being questioned, go to Nankani [a Sikh shrine in Pakistan]. Why only Khalistan, all of Hindustan is yours to liberate.) It believes that PoK must be liberated.

If the RSS is being held back, it is because the party is constantly in touch with PMO about developments in Kargil. Otherwise, there is overwhelming opinion in the RSS that India must cross the LoC. It will require a quick and unequivocal diplomatic resolution to the Kargil issue. Otherwise, it will be difficult to restrain the Sangh.

Rajni Srinivasan/New Delhi



WITH THE WARRIORS: *George Fernandes with soldiers and officers*

Fight The Real Battle

There is need for political unity over Kargil

India is fighting its longest undeclared war since its first on the same terrain 52 years ago. But India's political leadership outside the government in the Opposition, has forgotten the vital necessity for unity of aim and purpose in conflict situations. They are forgetting the war is in Kargil, not Kanpur, battles are being fought in Batalik, not Banaras and Dras, not Delhi. This is India's first war on television being carried live on screens and in print into every home.

How can the former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral in the middle of a fierce war, have the sense to suggest the formation of a national government? How can Sonia Gandhi say she will support the army but criticise the government? How can one draw a distinction between the government and the army? How can responsible Opposition parties accuse the army of being politicised and point a finger at the army chief Gen V P Malik? You can blame the army for lowering its guard in Kargil, not for dropping its time-tested apolitical traditions and respect for civilian control. That is why there can be no difference between the government of the day and the armed forces.

Some honourable members of Opposition parties and the media do not realise that their casual and habitual criticism of the government, and to a lesser extent the army in these difficult times, has led some gullible generals to write nasty letters to the military high command castigating them for muddying the fair name of the army.

Senior officers fighting the war in Kargil say they're very disturbed by these events and question the logic and rationale of political parties claiming they're behind the armed forces but will attack the government. "We take orders from this very government," say the generals. They also find inexplicable, the sustained attack on their defence minister, George Fernandes. "We have full confidence in him," said an air marshal.

Here is a defence minister who is up front among his soldiers from Samba to Siachen. Yet, he's being pilloried. His fault is, he is winning over the soldiers. Asks a colonel, "How can you fight the enemy when the government and defence minister directing the war are being constantly criticised. What message does this send to the soldier?"

In India, seldom is there any unanimity, even on national security. It is missing in a war-like situation and should come about. If the whole country can be



The Kargil situation is fully under control with no threat to any quarter. The intruders will either withdraw or be destroyed in battle. Or be frozen by weather. The Kargil battle will be won by the unprecedented support of the ordinary people of India for extraordinary soldiers of India. Let not petty politics mar the year of the Jawan

GEORGE FERNANDES: *Senior defence officers find the sustained attack on the defence minister inexplicable*

ope behind the armed forces at this time, why not the political parties? Democracy and free press are fine. But spare the Kargil brigade

It is not fair and correct to say that soldiers, fighting in Kargil are not properly equipped or armed. They could be better off with some hi-tech, but improved gadgetry in high altitude warfare is unreliable. However, they are not worse off for the lack of it. They are being supported with every combat multiplet in the military inventory and others are being procured. On the military outfit there is only one Himalayan brigade meant for Siachen. Additional Himalayan infantry will have to be trained and nurtured for new tasks.

The conquest of these sheer pinnacles in Dras and Batalik has more to do with indomitable battle and mountaineering skills of infantrymen than any revolution in military affairs. Technology will take a long time reaching the mountains. Not long ago Soviet technology was defeated by the Taliban in the mountains of Afghanistan.

There is need for patience and calm. The Kargil situation is fully under control with no threat to any quarter. The stress of time must not be superimposed on the higher stress of battle. The intruders will either withdraw or be destroyed in battle. Or be frozen by weather.

Pakistan will be stupid to make Kargil a Siachen, because it is not. India will not need three divisions to defend Kargil. This is pure disinformation stemming from self-styled military experts misreading of terrain. If Pakistan has held these intrusions with 800 men, India can do better with less. Some of these areas of intrusion were previously held by India and given up because these gaps between Indian defences were regarded difficult for infiltration and unsuitable for conventional operations. And Ladakh was unsuited for infiltration.

The Kargil battle will be won by the unprecedented support of the ordinary people of India for extraordinary soldiers of India. Let not petty politics mar the year of the Jawan. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

Shell-Shocked!

In Kargil, the artillery is causing heavy destruction

The casualty figures as on 28 June were 175 killed and 364 wounded. The proportion of killed to wounded is normally one is to three. The high kill rate is due to open and rocky terrain and a very high percentage of killed and wounded are due to enemy artillery fire.

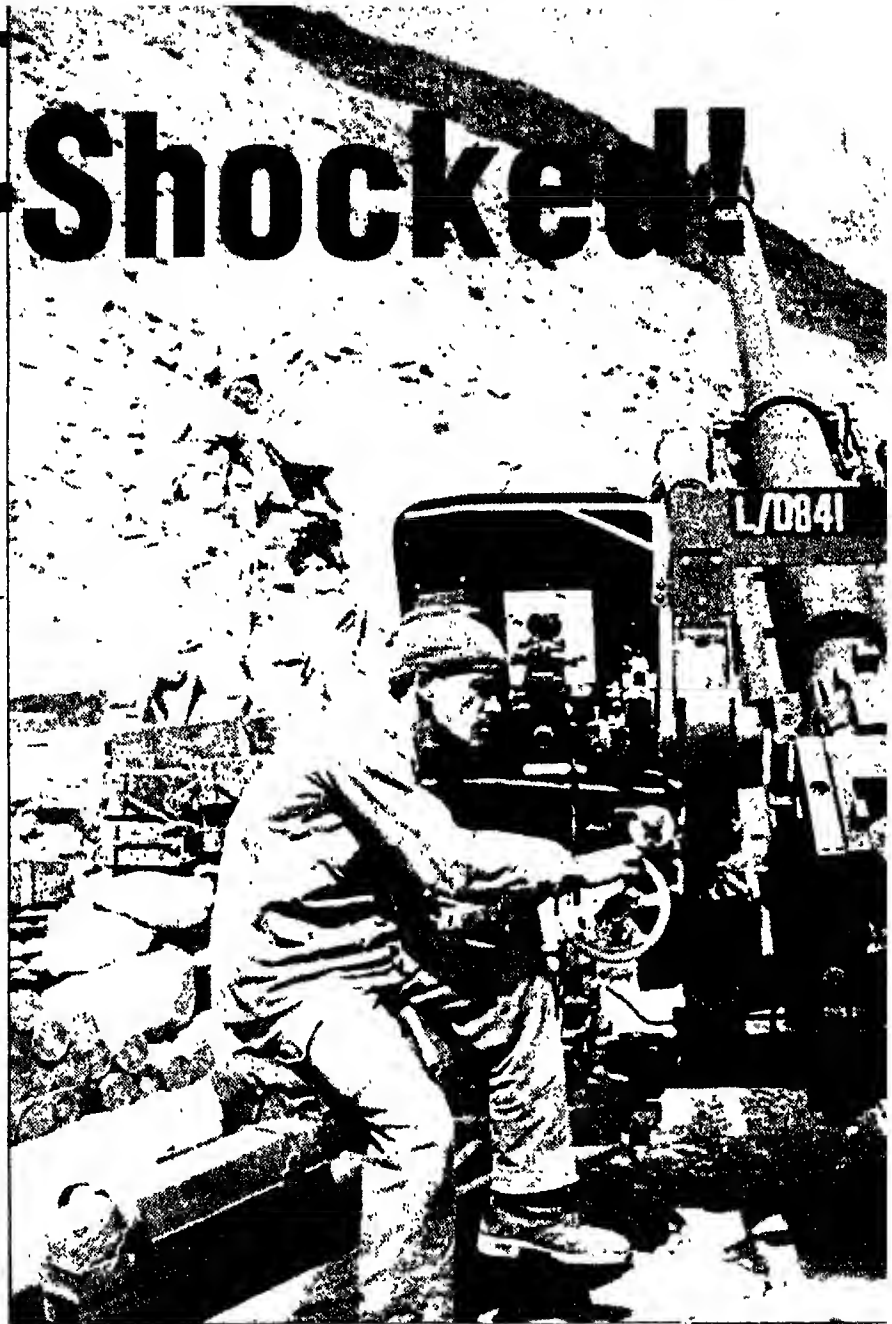
Of the 65 injured, who are receiving treatment in Army Base Hospital, New Delhi, 52 are nursing splinter and not bullet wounds. This is a definite indicator of the destructive role being played by the artillery on both sides. Moreover, with Indian troops now inching closer to the Line of Control (LoC), the intensity of artillery brought on them is increasing.

As the heights being vacated were earlier held by Pakistani regulars, their co-ordinates have been registered by them. When Indian troops capture a height, the retreating enemy directs artillery fire on the advancing Indian Army. Since the assaulting forces (Indian) are more in number than the retreating forces (Pakistan), Indian troops are exposed to enemy guns till the shelters are constructed.

The problem is bound to persist until the Pakistani guns are silenced. Despite all the air power and artillery used, the Pakistani guns are yet to be neutralized. Since these guns are located across the LoC, the air force can't hit them.

Thus, the only effective way to neutralize the guns would be counter-bombardment operations on the Pakistani artillery. This has to be done simultaneously with the task of providing cover fire to the advancing infantry. Pakistan has an edge in counter-bombardment.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, having planned the aggression, Pakistan had the time to plant persons within India who are now observing and directing fire. These could be trained militants or regulars present in India in the garb of locals. Secondly, Pakistan has gun-locating radars — ANTPQ 36&37.



These radars can locate the very source of gun-fire, notwithstanding its limitations in mountains. It does provide an edge during counter-bombardment operations. India too had almost struck a deal with the Americans for these radars, but the Pokhran blasts blew up the deal.

India, however, has the advantage of a superior and better laid-out artillery. Unlike Pakistan, which has not updated its artillery, India has been regularly modernising its equipment and arsenal. For instance, the Bofors has a variety of ammunition which gives it a lethal and destructive edge.

But Indian artillery is yet to realise its

THY NAME IS VALOUR: *An Indian soldier preparing to fire at enemy bunkers*

The only effective way to neutralize the guns would be counter-bombardment operations on the Pakistani artillery



full potential due to inadequate observation over intrusions of targets across LoC. Counter-bombardment of Pakistan's battle sustenance means like gun locations, supply camps, etc., has become vital. For this, there are a few options with India.

India can insert personnel across the LoC or send air observation helicopters to direct fire on the enemy side. Both these options, however, imply crossing the LoC.

There is a third option—use Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) piloted by a remote. They can be sent into enemy territory from where they can relay back coordinates of gun positions and supply bases. The wing-span of UAVs is barely

TYPE OF ARTILLERY GUNS USED BY INDIA

Type	Characteristics	Range (km)
105mm Indian Field Gun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior variant of the Pakistani version • Can fire high and low angles • Light weight 	17
120 mm mortar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light and transportable • Common weapon between India and Pakistan • Fast rate of fire 	7
160 mm mortar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective in mountains. • Not too destructive 	9.5
130 medium gun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot fire high angle • Limited deployment in mountain • Easy maintenance • Highly destructive ammunition 	27
155 mm Bofors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly destructive ammunition • Variety in ammunition • Can fire at high angles • Capable of screening enemy night vision • Cargo-an ammunition variety which splits into 72 bombs before it lands on target. 	40

Number of Indian guns deployed cannot be mentioned due to security reasons

Graphic by Nilratan Maiti

TYPE OF ARTILLERY GUNS USED BY PAKISTAN

Type	Characteristics	Numbers deployed in the battle sector	Range (km)
25 Pounders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An obsolete World War II gun • India phased these guns long time ago • Ineffective in terms of accuracy 	18	10.5
105 mm Howitzers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective in the mountain • Can take high angle shoots (easier to clear ridges and mountain tops) • Can be dismantled and moved to inaccessible areas by mules • Causes heavy destruction • Best gun in Pak artillery. 	30	12
155 mm Howitzers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Its shells cause high degree of destruction • Range is less for a heavy gun. • No variety in its ammunition 	30	16
5.5 mm Howitzers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shell weight: 35 kg • Can take high angle shoot. This makes it effective in mountains. • An old gun-outdated in India. • Very slow rate of fire. 	18	17
120 mm Mortar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An effective mid-range gun. • Can be carried by mules. • The only weapon common between India and Pakistan. 	24	7
122 mm MBRL (Multi-barrel rocket launcher)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fires 30 rockets in 20 seconds • Inferior to India's MBRLs • More effective in plains. • Ineffective for precision shooting 	6	28

Graphic by Nilratan Maiti

7.5 metres which not only prevents it from detection but makes it a difficult target to hit and even, if it is hit, it has an in-built mechanism to self-destruct.

In the mid-80s, Israel used UAVs called Aquila to direct artillery fire on Lebanon. Pakistan is using a Chinese variant, ASN 105 with a range of 150 km and an endurance of 2 hours

It is imperative for Indian gunners to see across the LoC to render enemy guns ineffective. In a battle where nothing other than shells can cross the LoC, a lot more thought would obviously go into using the artillery as the mainstay rather than a mere supporting mechanism to the advancing troops. •

Pranab Dhal Samanta / New Delhi

Why India Should

Doubtful military gains will undermine diplomatic success

The debate on whether or not India should cross the Line of Control (LoC) has become shrill. The LoC is not just a Lakshman Rekha which Pakistan has periodically violated despite exchanging delineated maps and signing the Simla Agreement in 1972. Unfortunately, India missed the chance then to seal the LoC. Pakistan was the vanquished nation down on its knees. Its capitulation was complete. Heaven knows why Mrs. Indira Gandhi and her Kashmir coterie let Pakistan off the hook. They are the guilty woman and men of 1971, responsible for Kargil.

The question one has to ask is what, at this stage of the battle, will crossing the LoC achieve militarily? Very little, except some feel good and vindication of honour but at immense human and material cost. Casualties, which is the key concern in eviction attacks, will be many more on crossing the LoC. Politically and diplomatically, India will stand to lose the international support it has gained from the remarkable show of restraint.

For dealing with Pakistan, one-seventh India's size, you do not need to shout from the rooftops you're crossing the LoC. You go ahead and do it quietly. The LoC should have been crossed around 15 May once the intrusions were established with whatever contingency plan there was. The retribution had to be quick. The ground and air strikes on our side of the LoC should have followed swiftly.

Six weeks on, the element of surprise for crossing the LoC is lost. Both sides are in battle stations. And there is no military necessity to enlarge the conflict at this stage. Pakistan has not created an untenable threat, as it did in 1965, to Akhnur. Today there is no similar threat to Siachen or Leh.

Therefore, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was quick to set aside any doubt on crossing the LoC when army chief, Gen. V.P. Malik reflected on looking beyond Kargil. Malik's was a tactical statement loaded with strategic nuances. But in a direct question on the need to cross the LoC he said that was the Cabinet's prerogative. He was not committing himself on the military necessity to do so but endorsed an earlier foreign ministry line that the option could be exercised in supreme national interest.

Vajpayee promptly ruled out crossing the LoC while acknowledging this would impose considerable operational difficulties on the armed forces. Simultaneously, Vajpayee sent a couple of messages outside India and across the LoC, that India had no intention of escalating the Kargil conflict and the Indian Army was willing and capable of vacating the aggression despite the operational handicaps. Vajpayee has ensured Pakistan does not engage in any miscalculation on account of India keeping open the option of crossing the LoC.

The Kargil War started with the government giving the armed forces the operational mandate to evict the intrusions.



ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE: Has ruled out crossing the LoC

The only term of reference was: LoC would not be crossed. More than six weeks later, after the slow pace of rolling back the intrusions and with heavy attrition, the military is having second thoughts on the soundness of a frontal eviction strategy. But the army chief who is also Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (CCSC) has not sought a revision of his mandate. He knows, unlike his counterpart, Gen. Parvez Musharraf, that he is fighting a politico-military war. No doubt at a time and place of Pakistan's choosing.

Clearly, Malik was also looking beyond the military connotation of the conflict, at the political and diplomatic isolation of Pakistan. The military war was being won diplomatically and crossing the LoC would negate the advantage of India's principled stand for moral high ground. Barring the Organisation of Islamic Countries and China, Pakistan has found no takers for its disingenuous disguise of violating the LoC and blaming the Taliban and India for it.

Pakistan has discredited itself as a responsible and rational

Don't Cross The LoC



NAWAZ SHARIF: *US President Bill Clinton conveyed to Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to withdraw the armed intruders from LoC*



GEN. VED MALIK: *He said the decision to cross the LoC lies with the Cabinet*

nuclear weapon state. No one is any longer in doubt about the army's decisive role in Kargil or the degree of civilian control over it. The Kargil fiasco is further proof of the army's reckless pursuit of a previously failed military strategy of wresting J&K.

Kargil has exposed the frailty of Pakistan. Its threat to use the ultimate weapon, doubtlessly for blackmail, has alarmed the already incensed international community. Pakistan insists it has not crossed the LoC and therefore not raised the threshold in the 11-year-old proxy war. Technically, it is the Taliban from the Indian side of occupied Kashmir, not the Pakistan Army, which has declared war. India's delayed but tough response of air and ground strikes has let Pakistan know the Indian threshold which for the present, does not include crossing the LoC.

Nineteen Sixty Five was however different. Neither side had nuclear weapons and no deterrence was in place. When Pakistan realised that Operation Gibraltar had been foiled in

Srinagar and Rajouri, and the Indian Army had retaliated by crossing the Cease Fire Line (CFL), and captured Haji Pir bulge and posts in Kargil, it launched a conventional armoured thrust in Chhamb Jaurian to cut off Akhnur bridge.

It was the strategic necessity to relieve pressure on Chhamb that forced India to widen the conflict beyond the CFL to across the international border opposite Lahore and Sialkot. This time around, both sides have kept the conflict localised to the Kargil sector over a 120 out of 740 km frontage.

In his most recent statement, Vajpayee has been equivocal about crossing the LoC saying it is a matter of battle strategy. This is likely to keep Pakistan guessing.

What are the military options on the escalation ladder? The first of these is for India to occupy ground across the LoC. Next and more attractive is to carry out an Israeli-type punitive air strikes against enemy targets like guns, posts, logistic bases, training camps, bridges, weapons and military facilities which either interfere with our operations or support the intrusions. It is also feasible to infiltrate special forces as in 1965 for some of these missions.

Still more attractive is sending Kashmiri freedom fighters into PoK and northern areas to start a proxy-war. But India is not geared for this. These options limit retaliation to opposite Kargil or other parts of LoC without widening the conflict.

Any one of these actions is guaranteed to attract immediate Pakistani reprisals with dangerous consequences. This is especially worrisome for Indian planners as one is not sure who is in command at this time in Pakistan.

The recent message from President Bill Clinton conveyed to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by General Zinni, C-in-C US Central Command (CENTCOM) required Pakistan to withdraw the armed intruders from LoC. This is the first clear signal that the US is determined to have the aggression vacated for India. American concern for the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and nuclear tensions has prompted this action.

According to a top US official, India has acted wisely in the face of extreme provocation. The US administration is determined to see Pakistan not only isolated but not rewarded for this aggression. By keeping the door to the Lahore process still open, India has kept the link with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Making the China tapes — conversations between Pakistani generals — available to Sharif before declassifying them was an Indian master stroke.

India has already suffered nearly 200 killed and 400 wounded in Kargil. It is time to go slow on physical assault and subject what is left of the intrusions to a Kosovo treatment: degrade Pakistan's capacity to fight and survive across the LoC by continuous air and ground strikes. We should take out his artillery supporting the intrusions and punish other facilities involved in this proxy battle. Further, ground troops should block his supply lines and isolate them. Most of all, let statecraft supplement battlecraft. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

Windfall

Sharad revolts, Pramod profits

It is a funny business, politics. Sharad Pawar says that he has rebelled to help Indians flourish in Indian politics. Of course, his motive is simpler: he wants to help himself. But here's the irony: he is going to end up helping Pramod Mahajan.

Though his streetwise style leads many people in Delhi to dismiss Mahajan as just another fast-talking, upwardly mobile politician, the truth is that Mahajan's importance in national politics waxes and wanes in direct proportion to the BJP's performance in Maharashtra politics.

His remarkable rise up the ladder of the party's hierarchy may have had something to do with L. K. Advani's blessings (since withdrawn) but the main cause was his extraordinary success in taking the BJP to power in Maharashtra in less than five years.

In the late Eighties, when the BJP had no role in Maharashtra politics, it was Mahajan who had the savvy to recognise that the best hope for the party was to piggyback its way into power by allying with the Shiv Sena. While many in the BJP hierarchy were appalled by the idea of associating with Bal Thackeray (to this day, Murl Manohar Joshi avoids appearing on a platform with Thackeray), Mahajan argued that the alliance was a necessary stepping stone. Five years ago, he won the argument when a BJP-Shiv Sena government took office in Maharashtra.

That feat accounted for his climb in the party and explained why he was appointed defence minister in Atal Behari Vajpayee's 13-day government in 1996. People started talking about him as a future party president, and he seemed destined for great things.

Alas, the problem with power that derives from state politics is that when there is a reverse in the state, you begin to seem less significant in Delhi as well. This was the fate that befell Mahajan in 1998 when widespread resentment against the unpopular BJP-Sena state government led the Congress to make sweeping gains in Maharashtra. The Congress-led front won 37 out of 48 constituencies, and many leaders lost their seats. Unfortunately for Mahajan, he was one of them.

He returned to Delhi, tail between his legs, to a barrage of hostility from all those who thought he had got too far, too soon. It did not help that Advani had also withdrawn his favour. But fortunately, Vajpayee threw him a lifeline in the form of the post of political adviser to the Prime Minister. In a few months, Mahajan got himself elected to the Rajya Sabha and became a part of the Cabinet.

Nevertheless, he remains haunted by that defeat. Not only did it show up the weakness in his position, it also allowed his critics to portray him as a Jaswant Singh-like figure who depended on Vajpayee's largesse for his political survival. Worse still, there was no indication that the crisis was over. The Maharashtra government continued to be unpopular. It was taken for granted that it would lose the next Assembly election, due this winter. And when a general election was called, the Congress expected to repeat its 1998 sweep.

Then, Sharad Pawar discovered that

Though his streetwise style leads many people in Delhi to dismiss him as just another fast-talking politician, the truth is that Mahajan's importance in national politics waxes and wanes in direct proportion to the BJP's performance in Maharashtra

Sonia Gandhi had been born in Italy. And God smiled on Pramod Mahajan.

The story goes that Pawar had made an offer to Mahajan. It was the Shiv Sena, not the BJP that was really unpopular. What if the BJP broke the alliance with the Sena in advance of the Assembly election? Pawar would break the Congress and would bring over enough Independents to ensure that a new BJP-Pawar alliance had a majority in the Assembly. Then, the new alliance could contest the Assembly elections together. So confident was Pawar that Mahajan would say yes that he assured his MLAs of ministerships in a matter of weeks.

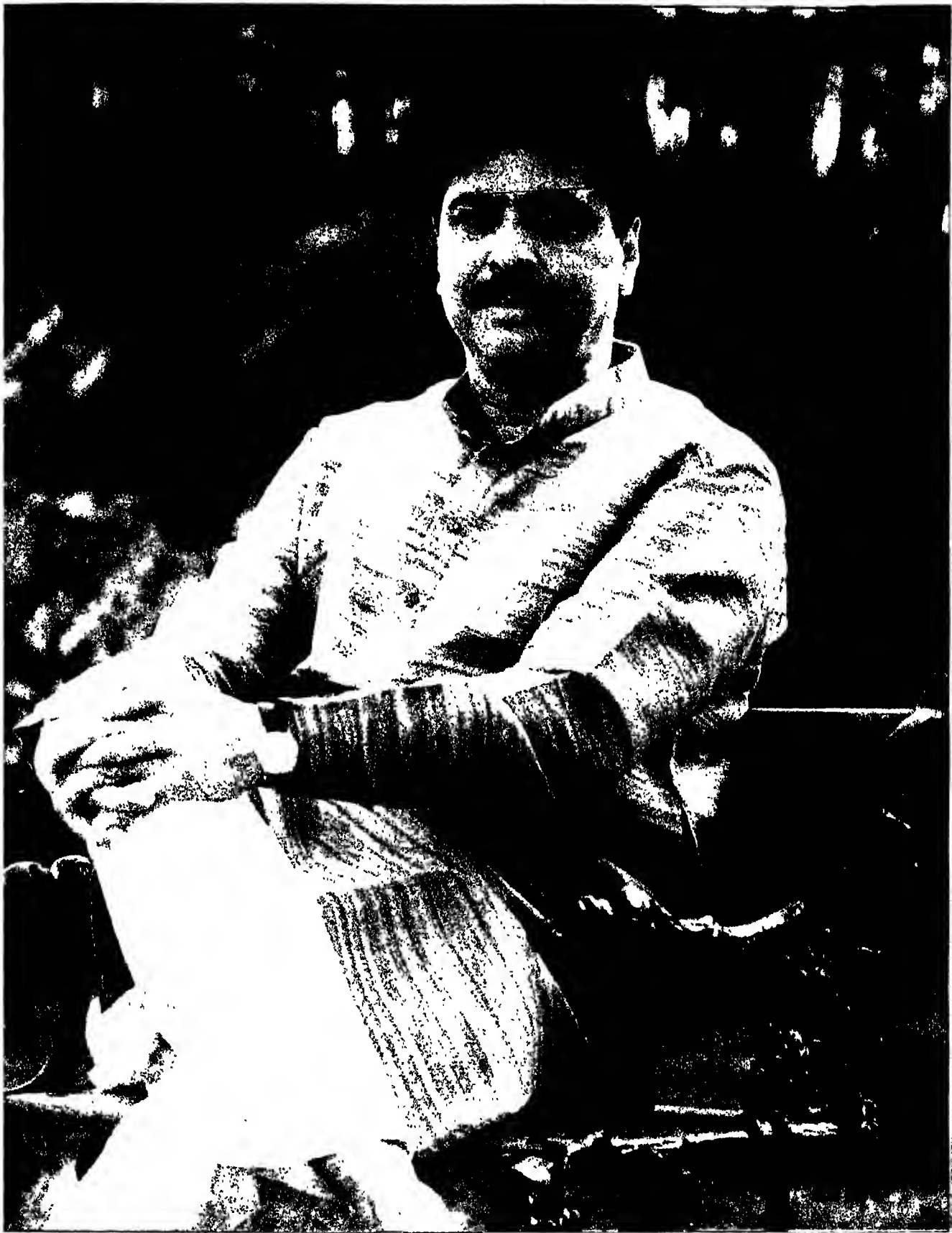
But Pramod Mahajan turned out to be smarter than Pawar. Look at it this way, he said. If the BJP aligned with Pawar, then it would face two opponents at the election, the Congress and the Shiv Sena. Of these two, the Shiv Sena would certainly eat into the BJP vote while it was not clear that Pawar's Congress vote bank was transferable to a BJP-led alliance. So how did the BJP gain?

On the other hand, if the BJP remained with the Shiv Sena, then it faced the delicious prospect of a split in the Congress vote. Pawar would not take any votes from the BJP-Sena alliance; all his support would come from the Congress vote bank. Once that happened, then the BJP-Sena alliance was certain to gain in any three-cornered fight. Therefore, Mahajan told Pawar, thank you very much but you've already done me a favour.

Nobody knows if this conversation really took place or even, if the story is true. But what nobody can dispute is that the BJP-Sena alliance will now do far better in Maharashtra than anyone had dared hope two months ago. Some people even predict that the split in the Congress vote will lead the alliance to win the majority of Maharashtra's parliamentary seats.

Once that happens, the nightmare of an electoral debacle in Maharashtra will be behind Mahajan. He will begin, once again, to seem like a substantial political figure, one of the BJP's state heavyweights. Nobody will call him 'Jaswant Singh with a stark' again. And he will resume his rise up the BJP hierarchy.

Who says that Sharad Pawar doesn't help other people? •



RUPINDER SHARMA

Chopstick Di

Sino-Indian relations turn over a new leaf

"My Chinese name is Lui Yang, my English name is

Lewis — do call me Lewis," is how the moon-faced bellboy dressed in bow-tie and jacket introduced himself on entering my room in the five-star Diaoyutai Hotel. It took me all of three days and the sign language at my command to make Lewis get me a table spoon. Instead he brought a Chinese soup spoon. The Lewises of Beijing are learning English fast. At the same time, they're imbibing even faster, the virtues of getting rich.

June is summertime in Beijing with temperature a mild 28 degrees centigrade (like April in Delhi). Beijing is

two-and-a-half-hours ahead of Indian Standard Time. The airport is a sea of red, the colour of the shirts worn by the ground staff. The arrival terminal resembles ours at Delhi — immigration, customs and out. It is quick, courteous and efficient. No Mao jackets, only slick Western clothes, mainly jeans and Chi-

Jaswant Singh



nese slit skirts and a horizon full of hoardings greet the newcomer.

A new airport alongside the old is to be inaugurated on 1 October, 2000, on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. Beijing is being renovated just for its half century, in a country where an ordinary blessing for life is 10,000 years. No sacred thought, deed or monument is younger than 5,000 years.

An expressway as good as any German autobahn, lined with smoke and gum trees and weeping willows, costs 15 yuan (one yuan is Rs 5) for transit. The old road parallel to the new is also available. By Western standards, Beijing is not expensive. Traffic flow is rectangular, not circular as in Delhi, with

Foreign minister Tang Jiaxuan waiting in the foyer of his ministry building to welcome Jaswant Singh



plomacy

side streets and roads cutting across the main avenues at frequent intervals.

Traffic is multiple and chaotic, like the Dharamtalla-Chowringhee crossing at Calcutta. Trams, buses, bicycles, carts, Chinese cars, other cars resembling Maruti vans and Zens ply carelessly jumping red lights. The cyclist and pedestrians are emperors of the road. Beijing has the highest accident rate in the world. It has also had the highest sustained growth rate in the world of between 7 and 10 per cent over the last ten years, quadrupling its GNP in 20 years. Only Chinese leaders have the temerity to declare publicly the desired national targets and time frame for achievement.

Avenue For Eternal Peace is Beijing's main road, the historic and cultural lifeline along which live some

Until foreign minister Jaswant Singh came here last month and untied the knot in Sino-Indian relations, Indian diplomats have been virtually quarantined following India's nuclear tests last year and naming China a threat...

key symbols of Chinese civilisation. Its modern heart and soul centres on the revered and (simultaneously) reviled Tien An Man Square currently quarantined for a face lift.

Just a few days ago on 4 June, the tenth anniversary of the clash between old guards and modernites, another stand-off was averted. Smart soldiers of the People's Armed Police (PAP), revamped after the confrontation at Tien An Man ten years ago from a half a million to one million force to reduce clashes between the people and the People's Liberation Army (PLA), patrol the scaffolding behind which stand the obelisk and Mao's Mausoleum.

Tien An Man Square represents the struggle for harmony between the ordi-

India and China talk. The meeting between Jaswant Singh and Tang Jiaxuan



The Heavenly Gate to the Forbidden City with the Mao portrait

nary living and the invincible dead. Opposite this square and the prouetting policeman minding the traffic along Eternal Peace is the currently forbidden Heavenly Gate to the Forbidden City adorned by a massive Mao portrait.

China's royalty from the Yuan to Ming dynasties lived in this Forbidden city with courtyards the size of five football grounds, several moats and gate after Heavenly gate of Eternal Peace. In the main courtyard barricaded from public interference, PLA and PAP recruits are being schooled in drill, discipline and divine thoughts. The film *Last Emperor*, banned in China, was shot amidst the galaxy of symmetrical palaces of this city.

Each of the half-a-dozen palaces was functional from the Hall of Practising Moral Culture to the Hall for Nuptials to the Gate of Great Harmony. This unique architectural marvel outside its last gate is overlooked by what is called a Hanging Garden where the emperor would seduce his favourite queen



China's modern day Communist Party leaders dressed in dark suits and practising a rare blend of Kissinger and Mao thoughts live in the nearby Zhong Nan Hi Palace which is out of bounds for ordinary mortals

China's modern day Communist Party leaders dressed in dark suits and practising a rare blend of Kissinger and Mao thoughts live in the nearby Zhong Nan Hi Palace which is out of bounds for ordinary mortals. Outside the party's residential quarters, emblazoned in gold letters on red walls are these eternal slogans: Ten Thousand Years To The Great Chinese Communist Party! Ten Thousand Years To The Invincible Mao Zedong Thoughts!

A less ancient and more modern structure is the Great Hall of China with a seating capacity of 10,000 where the National People's Congress is held. Anything short of 10,000 years will not do in China.

Until foreign minister Jaswant Singh came here last month and untied the knot in Sino-Indian relations, Indian diplomats have been virtually quarantined following India's nuclear tests last year and naming China a threat and the reason for

them. There are few memories here of the bitter 1962 Himalayan War, at least not in public. The people are friendly and pragmatic. Getting rich is no longer scorned. It is China's modern gateway for Heavenly Peace.

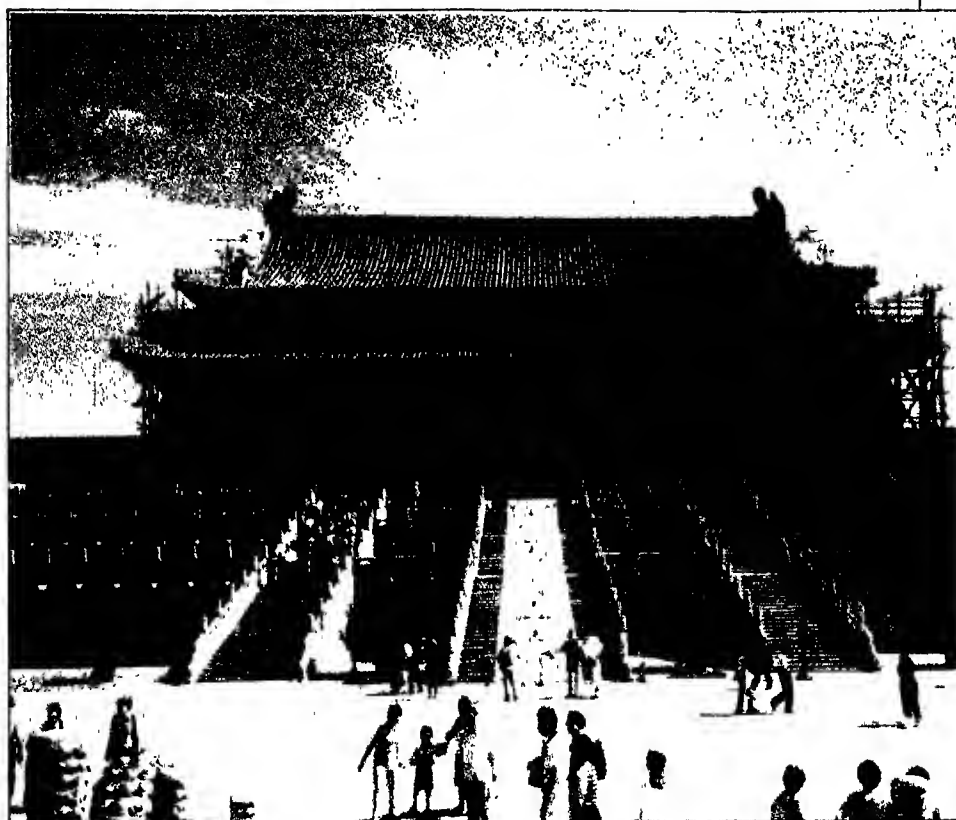
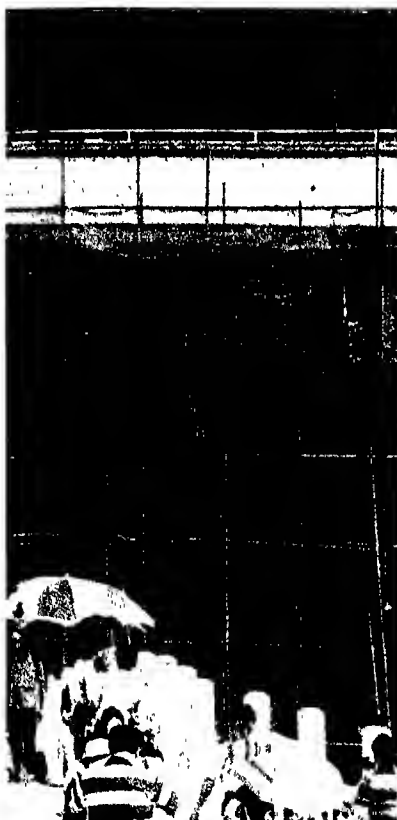
Beijing has a small but immaculate metro which was built in the late Fifties as a nuclear shelter against a Soviet nuclear attack. Even today, the Russian embassy is the largest foreign colony in Beijing. Public transport is clean and convenient. Taxies come in different colours and rates according to their quality. There is a glass partition between the driver and the passenger in the front seat. The driver is required, when asked, to give a receipt for the fare.

Beijing food is not regarded as authentic Chinese which is to be found in Shanghai. Yet restaurants serve a variety of Oriental food. A typical Chinese meal, approximately Rs 250 per person,

will consist of soup, prawns for starters, steamed rice, pork, chicken or beef and one vegetable. There is no concept of a sweet dish or vegetarian food. Ordering pudding in the hotel restaurant was sacrilege. It sent the bevy of delicate waitresses in a tizzy saying 'Moment! Moment! Moment!' They are all programmed for a fixed course of functions with little scope for flexibility. Half-an-hour later, ice cream was produced, procured from Baskin Robbins.

Peking Duck is the gourmet speciality. There are only three outlets in Beijing which serve the original recipe though in five-star hotels the version has been stylised. Although there are no more than 30 Indians living in Beijing (the bulk are in Shanghai) other than the embassy staff, there are a couple of Westernised Indian restaurants — Shamiana, Taj and Tandoor. Shamiana has a Maharashtrian chef from Bombay. There is a brightly-lit Moscow restaurant nearby, probably intended for the big Russian community in China.

Beijing has two main English newspapers — *People's Daily* and *China Daily*. They are the mouthpiece of the Communist Party and the government. They cost less than one yuan and are on the Internet: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>



On 14 June, the day Jaswant Singh arrived for talks with his Chinese counterpart, Tang Jiaxuan, *China Daily* reflecting the Chinese position of relative neutrality on Kargil, on its opinion page produced an uncaptioned cartoon. Poor look-alike caricatures of foreign ministers Sartaj Aziz and Singh were shown playing cards. Aziz is waving a

card depicting a tank and Singh, a jet fighter. And both are seated on nuclear weapons. This was China's public posture.

In private the Chinese Pakistan tilt on Kargil came out loud and clear from an exchange with Chinese scholars at the Academy of Social Sciences. No wonder Sino-Pak relations are described as

The main palace in the Forbidden City, the central axis which is inlaid with dragons was reserved for the emperor.

"comprehensive and all weather."

Unfortunately, the weather packed up the next day on the Long March to the Great Wall of China. Seventy five km west of Beijing are the 10,000 years old Badaling Hills. Badaling means the Great Wall. It is China's premier tourist attraction, spellbinding experience even under a heavy drizzle and overcast sky. The Great Wall logo is everywhere 'I climbed the Great Wall of China' is printed on souvenirs and can be tattooed too.

The Great Wall notice reads: "The Great Wall is one of the greatest wonders in the world. She is a living marvel and the greatest military construction in the world. The construction began during Zhou dynasty (220-221 BC). Its walls were meant to protect Chinese territory. The Great Wall stretches from Yalu river in the east to Jiyan Pass in the west, covering six thousand km, spanning five provinces and autonomous regions. The Wall is 7 meters high, 5 meters width and has many fortresses and beacon towers. She was designated a major historical asset in 1801."

The new high-rise skyline in Beijing. The penthouse is given the traditional pagoda canopy. Cranes on the skyline are the new symbol of urban growth





Walking up on the Great Wall on a wet and overcast day

The walk along a Great Wall may remind some Indians of the walk to Vaishno Devi except this is full-fun pilgrimage breaks for archery, camel ride, horse ride, souvenir-hunting and love-making. Despite the rain, the stone-cobbled pathway on the wall is clogged with tourists.

The Great Wall expressway ensures the return to Beijing in less than 45 minutes. There is time for Hengda beer and a quick shower before the Indian ambassador Vijay Nambiar's banquet for Jaswant Singh and Friends of India and China. Instead of Mao Tai there is French wine, no Peking Duck but Tandoori Chicken. And it is back to Panchsheel, the five principles of peaceful coexistence.

With China and India no longer a threat to each other Singh proposed a toast to (10,000 years) Sino-Indian relations. Madam Qian Qiongying, President of the Friendship Society, reciprocated the goodwill. The unsung star of the evening however is Mr Zheng Qingdian, director of the Asian department in the ministry of foreign affairs. The youthful Zheng is an old India hand, speaks Hindi fluently and has kept the India desk since 1981.

As a result of the latest round of talks, China has proposed starting a security

dialogue and offered at last to give clarification on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Veteran China-watchers contend that Zheng is the key player in the LAC negotiations. To a request from an Indian delegate: "LAC key mamle ko khatam kijiye." He replied "Zaroor khatam karenge."

The diplomatic enclave in Beijing is located between the all weather Friendship Store like our Cottage Industries Emporium in Delhi, and a departmental store on one side and the flea market on the other. Made In Thailand clothing with exotic brandnames goes for the fewest of yuans. Although Chinese currency is fully convertible, the dollar is much sought after. Luckily there is no hassle about money change. The exchange rate is uniform — 100 dollars equals 807.93 yuan. One can buy back dollars at the same rate with the leftovers.

Pakistan's army chief, Gen Parvez Musharraf was in Beijing last month for a ten-day visit at the invitation of defence minister and vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) Chi Hau Tin. He met Gen Fu Quan You, CGS, PLA who visited India before the nuclear tests last year. Musharraf also met the senior-most PLA officer and vice-chairman CMC (No 1) Zhang Wan Nian.

Pakistan and China are collaborating on joint production of a fighter jet F-7 MG, a 21st century tank (T-88) and modern frigates. The most notable event of Musharraf's China travel is the now famous tape intercepts of his telephone conversations from Hotel Chinaworld no 83315 with his CGS, Lt Gen Mohammad Aziz. These are known as the China tapes.

Soon after Jaswant Singh left for India, the Chinese were expecting Mr Thomas Pickering of the US State Department. The Chinese are very angry with the US over what they regard was the deliberate bombing of their embassy in Belgrade. They object to US unilateralism and hegemony. It is now the turn of the Americans to untie the knot.

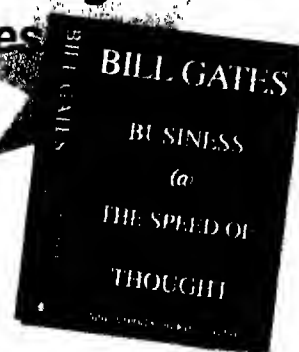
Singh not only broke the Gordian knot but also put an end to the controversial Nuclear Tests and Threats chapters. India cannot fight on two fronts. Both India and China have, according to Singh, turned over a new leaf. The Chinese have a saying: No War without Victory. Singh has turned this around. For India it is now Victory Without War. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/Beijing



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SHE'S A PRACTICAL GIRL

Attention: cynical, know-it-all character analysts. You thought beauty queens were easy to deconstruct. You may be wrong. Not all of them are vain enough to think that it's natural transition from beauty pageants to acting. In a realistic move for a successful future shot at acting, Ex-Miss World **Diana Hayden** is imbibing precious acting lessons at a school in New York. And, as a buffer arrangement — labour of love? — her boyfriend Kaizen Gustaad (of the *Bombay Boys* fame) has taken it upon himself to write out a script for her. We'll keep track of your progress, Diana



THE COCKTAIL'S HERE, FOLKS

Good year for fusions. First was *Elizabeth* — English history, Australian heroine, Indian director. Now Akbar Khan, who directed the teleserial *Akbar The Great*, comes up with his own cross-continental bill of



CELEBRITY PARTNERSHIP

Who: Parmeshwar Godrej with Shekhar Kapur

The bond: Godrej's production company Starlight where Kapur is a partner. The unit's maiden venture was an ad film for the soap, *Ganga*; Kapur directed it

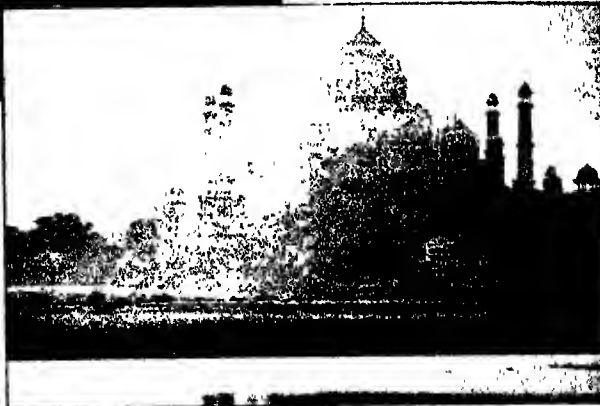
Godrej says: She never really anticipated such a project with Shekhar until she saw *Bandit Queen*. Till then she thought "he was some yuppie who gatecrashed into her parties for some barbecued steak"

Our prediction about the company: Should have a long run. Matters have now gone beyond steaks to stakes



music by a Greek composer. Mumtaz, of course, has to be Indian.

It's a bit too early to say if **Yanni** will be composing music for the whole film. What is important is his participation — a big USP for the director. Makes sense too: he is a self-proclaimed activist for the protection and preservation of this wonder of the world.



fare: a film about the construction of the Taj Mahal, the love story of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and his wife Mumtaz, a Hollywood actor for the lead role and — this is interesting —

What we shouldn't hope to look forward to is hero and heroine running around trees on verdant slopes. Hollywood stars don't do that. And certainly not a Mughal empress!

SECOND CAREER

The plot: Pressures an individualist professor-cum-novelist faces while trying to



balance his work with family life.

The cast: Includes Kruttika Desai, Himani Shivpuri and Vishal Singh. Producers of **Talat Aziz's** serial *Dil Apna Preet Parai* (he plays the prof.) say the storyline is unique enough to keep viewers glued to their sets 'forever'. Difficult to gulphat down. But Aziz — better known as a *ghazal* singer — whose first and only film *Dhun* hasn't yet seen the light of day, must be a tense man praying that the serial is telecast someday. Amen.



RUPINDER SHARMA

IT'S NATURAL

In sales verbal wit counts. You may be knocking on every door on your beat trying to sell your stuff, but the guy who talks fast and answers faster counts the nickels earlier. After marketing pundits termed Swedish cosmetic and skin-care company Oriflame's new range of products a 'love a' fair', the company's CEO Lajinder Bawa quipped: the love affair with India continues "So, when is the marriage?" asked those who were present at the launch function in the capital. "Soon," replied Bawa, "but before that we must have an engagement."

If that was quick, Bawa slipped in a quicker one later. Claiming that Oriflame uses only natural products to suit the climate, he said, "We have not had to change any of the formulae to suit India." The function ended with a fashion show displaying the new products.



THEY DIDN'T
GO DOWN
FIGHTING FOR
THEIR LIVES
IN KARGIL,
BUT FOR OURS.

**Baron humbly contributes Rs. 100 on every
Aiwa hi-fi music system and CTV sold towards
the families of our departed patriots.**



A Close

Sarfarosh is the first realistic film on Indo-Pak conflict and the role of the ISI



Director John Mathew Mathan

Times of conflict drive the two trends which fuel movies — romance and realism — to extremes. You can get the giddy lyricism of a musical where a soldier's principal avocation is to sing lustily, or the flint-edged harshness of a drama where the man in uniform tries stuffing back his comrades' spilled intestines in a futile attempt to save his life.

The lingering unease with these two polarised points-of-view was articulated by film historian Eric Rhode when he wrote in his definitive history of the cinema: "Realism came to mean the inconvenient subject, the awkward fact, the discomforts of restriction; while romance came to mean the engulfing release of desire." Neither gives you the full picture.

Movies get it wrong. They have to, because of their prime compulsion: to get enough people into the theatre to recover the money put in, and perhaps





Encounter

make a profit. And there's no way that the rigours of a soldier's life, or death, in a real-life situation, can get translated on to the screen attractively enough to keep them coming. What we've been seeing of the battle in Kargil, filtered through television and print, is both disturbing, and sad. The convoy of trucks, carrying their human load, becomes an impersonal addition, another component of the arsenal that two warring nations bring to bear against each other; the men within, huddled in their olive green parkas, going off to face the public enemy and private demons, just so many ciphers.

On the prime-time news bulletins, the *jawans* are faceless and the officers speak only when they have to: those talk-

Popular movies purveying patriotism make the viewing experience palatable. Quibble, if you will, (and you will), on the manner in which they do it. Screen soldiers are in the main, hugely bonhomous. Or they are irritatingly bluff. They negotiate ravines by breaking into songs. They sit around campfires, flashing back to the sweetheart in the village in lurid technicolour. And in battle, they either deliver themselves of fiery speeches as they fire into enemy trenches, or die in a maudlin heap in the arms of a comrade.

You can see a *Border*, shed a tear for the dying *jawan*, cheer for the major who socks it to his opposite number in the Pakistan army, and go home, feeling

In the waterfall sequence Aamir Khan is shown debating a minor point: should he lock himself in a passionate embrace or should he stand aloof as Sonali Bendre frolics invitingly

ing on their behalf do it far away from the area of conflict, from plush offices in capital cities, where the media trolls, trailing microphone wires. What comes to us are the stark images of the tortuous mountain terrain, where the spectacular ice-floe is a death-trap, and not a fluffy fashion accessory that the lead players roll about in, clad only in flimsy chiffons. What comes to us are also, tragically, bodybags of those brave young men who lay down their lives for the country, and the anguish of those that they leave behind.

This is where television gets it right. Or at least it has the capacity to do so. TV is real in a way film can never be. It makes war accessible, and turns it into a participatory exercise: as a nation, we need to see what the man in front of the firing line feels, what he thinks, indeed, what he looks like. The best broadcasts from the frontline provides us a way of doing this: they provide us a way of seeing.

worthy. You can't do that with TV, even with the sanitised images we are being allowed from the peaks of Drass, Batalik, and when the young men come back in coffins you can reach out and touch the anguish and the grief of those that have been left behind.

If the movies get real, as in real-life, no one will want to see them. The colour of spilled blood is line up there, out there, because we know it's high-grade paint. If there are more syncopated choruses than synchronised groans, it's dandy, because too much grimness can get in the way of enjoyment. If the hero suddenly comes upon a waterfall, with a bevy of beauties disporting themselves on convenient rocky outposts, that's fine too: waterfalls exist, don't they?

So when old, dessicated patriot Manoj Kumar re-launches his son in *Jai-Hind*, we are completely unsurprised to see him (the son) engaged in every other pursuit but that of a soldier on duty. He comes upon, yes, a trothy body

of water, where he, yes pumps hips with his leading lady

It is a matter of some amusement that a waterfall plays an important part in *Sarfarosh*, a recent film which shows us in some clear-eyed detail, for the first time, the specifics of the proxy-war that Pakistan has been waging for a long time. Wallowing in the water allows Aamir Khan time to romance Sonali Bendre while debating a minor point—should he appear colour-coded with leading lady Sonali Bendre in passionate embrace, or should he stand aloof as she frolics invitingly. He does both—dons the exact shade of scarlet as her splayed-to-the-skin sheath, and treats her first with gentle disdain and then restrained ardour.

However, Aamir Khan's latest release, directed by John Mathew Mathan, goes well beyond the sort of plot-line which uses soaked-and-heaving bosoms to get by. It talks of a contemporary India, laid under siege by covert and overt activity by a hostile Pakistan. It has a hero who works with single-minded ferocity to smash an enemy network. And whose ability to cavort with scantily-clad ladies doesn't detract from his ability to draw a bead on the enemy, and shoot straight and true.

A *Sarfarosh* in the time of Kargil is more than a co-incidence—it is a film waiting to happen. We've had films on war and '*deshbhakti*' for a long time and specifically on the continuous attrition between India and Pakistan, which flares up into 'war-like' situation, much like the present. But *Sarfarosh* goes much further, it not only eschews such cant as 'neighbouring country' and the omnisci-

ent 'foreign hand' ('*videshi taakat*'), it squarely names Pakistan and the ISI as the culprits behind the unrest on the border.

Upright cop Ajay Singh Rathod, played superbly by Aamir, is a man who loves his country, and places it above filial ties. His brother is killed and his father permanently crippled, in a freak encounter with terrorists, but when his mother tries to stop him from going off on a dangerous raid, he shrugs her off, saying he has to go. His angry exchange with a Muslim colleague turns into a lecture on How To Be a Patriotic Indian. '*Yeh desh mera ghar hai*', he thunders, and whoever threatens his 'ghar' (home) will come to grief.

There are long sequences in which sophisticated arms are ferried from across the border at an identifiable checkpoint (the name of the Rajasthan town is on the map) in collusion with Pakistani army officials, venal Indian merchants and 'Mujahiddins' masque-

ading as *ghazal*-singers: these are not comic-book caricatures with such names as Mogambo and Dang, filled with mock menace. These are people who go by the name of Mireh Seth and Gulfam Hassan (a cross between Ghulam Ali and Mehdi Hassan?) and appear credible.

There was a resonance across the wires when Pakistan's claims that the infiltrators in Kargil were Mujahiddins and had nothing to do with its army regulars, turned out to be false. In the film, the *ghazal* maestro who is the prime mover behind the arms dealing has links with the ISI but if *Sarfarosh* happily breaches the sacrosanct line where the movies stayed strictly away from name-calling, it tries doing a politically correct balancing act by having good Muslims and bad Hindus, and sprinkling the traitors and the patriots among both.

Coming at the juncture that it has, *Sarfarosh* comes as close as it dares to that elusive quality, realism. It talks about realpolitik, and reflects the situation on the ground, albeit in the idiom of the '*masala*' movie. In that sense it is 'more real' than the Mani Ratnam trilogy on love-in-the-time-of-terrorism in *Roja-Bombay-Dil Se*, especially than the first which is located in Kashmir and strongly implicates Pakistan in the arming and training of local militants. Mani

Sarfarosh is more real than the Mani Ratnam trilogy on the theme of love in the time of terrorism. Ratnam



Ratnam is a master storyteller, and lavishes enormous style on his movies; he also slathers them with a layer of romanticism so thick that the real keeps receding.

The difference is apparent if you compare sequences from the films. Arvind Swamy in *Roja* flings himself on his country's burning flag to douse the flames; it is a visually dramatic scene, and the sort of memorable flourish that Mani Ratnam executes so well. Aamir Khan



On the
battlefield,
screen soldiers
mouth fiery
speeches as they
fire into enemy
trenches, or die
in a maudlin
heap in the
arms of a
comrade

in *Sarfarosh*, recuperating in hospital after a murderous attack, flings himself on to a *gadlu* (traitor), and is dragged down a corridor all the way to the entrance where the man escapes. Dreary stuff, a dimly lit stairwell down which the hero falls, letting the bad guy go, to boot, against the bright flames, the flag and Swamy's agonised face, and the proud swell of music as national honour is saved. In *Sarfarosh*, the glossed-up, glamorous bits are distinct set-pieces, put in for strictly crowd-gathering purposes, but the film is always in a hurry to get back to the business at hand — to identify the *deshbhakts* and pitch them into battle and corner and overpower the enemy. It is the way in which the movie keeps returning to the heart of the story which makes it score, getting more right than wrong.

Soft-focus, pop patriotism has turned out to be a great seller in the 90s, and there are several directors who've made a comfortable living making movies which tell us how much they love their India: Subhash Ghai plants himself on a boat amongst his cast in his huge hit *Pardes* and sings the line as lustily as Amrish Puri and Mahima Chaudhary. He also gets his virginal leading lady who goes by the name of Ganga to slap an over-enthusiastic fiancé, when he tries to kiss her. Indian girls don't, before marriage, she declares, and walks

out on the cad, who is Indian, who lives in America, and who, just like all Americans, bed-hops. Very 'rah rah', very laudable, but a trifle inexact, because there are statistics to prove that Indian girls do, before marriage, and statistics don't lie. Movies do, especially Hindi movies which deal with more masses than any other, even those that come out of Hollywood. Because they, to rephrase Alfred Hitchcock a little, 'suffer from their own power of appealing to millions. They could often be subtler (or truer, emphasis mine), but their own popularity won't let them'.

Take, for example, the movies of Yash Chopra which extol the virtues of Indian culture and tradition: the patriotism in a *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* isn't as strident as, say, in *Border*, but the strong flavour of *Meri jaan Hindustan mera Bharat mahaan*, which permeated through the former had the turnstiles ticking madly. When Chopra hit upon the device of Shah Rukh Khan refusing to elope with Kajol, preferring to wait for parental consent, he unwittingly articulated the pent-up sentiments in a whole generation which is proud of their children's ability to speak convent-English but highly discomfited by their desire to choose lovers or/and spouses. You could start wondering at the intensity of the professed passion between the two: are these lovers or wimps? But Chopra doesn't give you much of a chan-

ce to do so, by getting the extended joint family to give their blessings to the pair, he neatly sidesteps the rigid ire of the girl's father, allowing the *dhawala* to take his *duhanniya* away. Small wonder that the movie turned out to be the biggest grosser of the year, not only in India but also in the overseas market, whose NRI population adopted with great fervour Chopra's re-working of Raj Kapoor's famous credo of the *japani joota* (actually, with the advent of Nike and Reebok, more American than Japanese) and the *Hindustani dil*.

Moviemakers are constantly battling with the classic dilemma: should they get real and chase the mass audience away, or should they give them flavoured bubblegum for the mind? Back in 1950, Raymond Chandler wrote, "The motion picture admittedly is faced with too large a mass; it must please too many people and offend too few, the second of these restrictions being infinitely more damaging to it artistically than the first." Fifty years on the dilemma has only intensified, if only for the reason that the numbers have multiplied by several millions. The modest box-office success of a *Sarfarosh* could be a trend-setter; it breaks the stranglehold artifice has on the construction of popular movies with its appropriation of the real. It leaves you with a sense of freshness, and hope. •

Shubhra Gupta/New Delhi



SUSHMITA SEN



AISHWARYA RAI

If Sushmita Sen has been wowing viewers in *Sirf Tum and Biwi No. 1* then can Aishwarya Rai be far behind? Not a chance. The beautiful Ash has shown her true colours in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* — and very pretty colours they are too.

Not only does Ms Rai

look drop-dead gorgeous — but then, that's never been a problem for her — she also dances like a dream, holding her own against Salman Khan quite easily. But there's a special bonus on offer here: Aishwarya Rai actually acts — and acts well.

So, now that both these former beauty queens have proved their point, can we expect the battle between them to hot up once again?

KHAAS BAAT

Indo-British collaborations don't always work. Ask Suchitra Krishnamurthy aka Mrs Shekhar Kapur. Encouraged, perhaps, by the success of her husband's collaborative venture, *Elizabeth*, Suchitra took up Andrew Lloyd Webber's offer to write a tune for her new album.

Thus, the title track of *Zindagi* was scored by Lloyd Webber, who has such earlier hits as the musicals *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera* to his credit. But unfortunately for Suchitra, the Lloyd Webber touch didn't quite work in the Indian context. And *Zindagi*, with its sweet, soulful tune, didn't do half as well as Daler Mehndi's robust *bhangra* numbers or even Alisha Chinai's catchy *Wah Wah*.

May be the video, which stars Shekhar Kapur, will do better. But nobody's betting on it.

Is there any truth to the rumour that Tara Deshpande and Naseeruddin

Shah shared more than an on-screen kiss during the making of *Bombay Boys*? Both Tara and Naseer are very tight-lipped about their relationship, though it is no secret that they get along famously. But there are



those who insist that Naseer is very, very taken with his vivacious co-star.

But then, Shah has always gone in for that type, as those who know his wife, Ratna, will readily attest to. So, perhaps, this is one story we should not dismiss out of hand.

Rinke Khanna couldn't have had a debut more different from her elder sister, Twinkle, if she had tried. While Twinkle was launched in a big-budget production, *Barsaat*, Rinke's *Pyar Mein Kabhi Kabhi* is a less



ambitious project. While Twinkle was launched against Bobby Deol, a star son, Rinke has unknowns like Dino Morea — or Siddhant, to give him his screen name — starring opposite her.

There's one advantage to this, though. While Twinkle had no option but to play second fiddle to Bobby, given that *Barsaat* was a Deol home production; Rinke is unquestionably the focus of *Pyar Mein Kabhi Kabhi*, with the two heroes bringing up the rear.

But does this mean that Rinke will have better luck at the box-office than *didi* did? Watch this space. •

Angry hills

A diplomatic end to the war-like situation in Kargil is unlikely



So the idea of 'safe passage' for the Pakistani invaders of Kargil, first voiced by George Fernandes, off his own bat and without any provocation, was not a figment of the imagination of idlers and busybodies only. Pakistanis obviously had it in their minds but only as a fall-back position after all else was lost. The trouble with the foot-in-the-mouth George, however, was that he spoke not only too soon but also out of turn.

Rather than leave it to the Pakistanis to ask for an 'exit corridor', the bumbling defence minister shot the bolt and delivered what might have been a useful idea, a shattering blow. The *coup de grace* to this concept has now been executed by the permanent Pakistani Establishment. Any hope of a diplomatic end to the Pakistani misadventure in an area of the highest strategic importance to India has therefore to be bidden goodbye.

Even before Fernandes spoke about a 'safe passage', he had needlessly complicated things by declaring both Nawaz Sharif and even the ISI innocent of the Kargil outrage, and put all the blame on the Pakistani Army. Strangely, he has persisted in this assertion — backed emphatically by the Samata Party general secretary, Jaya Jaitly — despite authoritative reports from Pakistan that Nawaz, as Prime Minister, had given his 'broad approval' to the dastardly operation in Kargil. If he allowed the Army to get away with giving him only sketchy details of their diabolical plan, he needs to be indicted for incompetence, not given a peace prize.

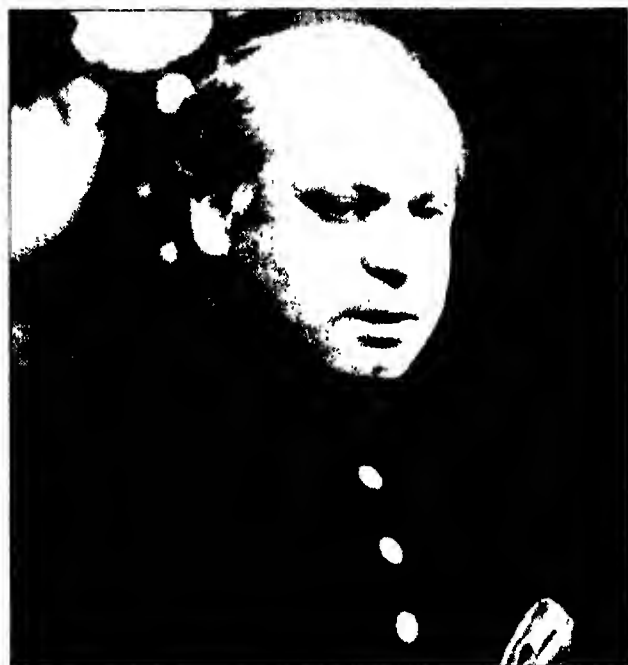
In any case, after the enormity of the Pakistani perfidy and the gravity of the Kargil outrage had become manifest even to the meanest intelligence, what did Mian Nawaz Sharif do? He stood fast with General Javed Musharraf and the whole lot of rabid extremists. He competed with them in wild anti-India rhetoric. He parroted the nonsense that the "freedom fighters" occupying strategic heights in the Dras-Kargil-Batalik sector were not under Pakistan's control, while the wide world could see that soldiers of Pakistani Northern Light Infantry constituted the backbone of the invading outfit. And on a visit to the troops on the LoC, in the company of the Army Chief, he declared, amidst loud applause, "*Kashmiri bane ga Pakistan*."

If, in spite of all this, Nawaz did spare a thought for starting secret talks with New Delhi, even behind the smokescreen of his overblown rhetoric, the reason for this is not far to seek. It was the unexpectedly tough American opposition to the Pakistani misadventure. The mentor of Pakistan for nearly half a century was finally fed up with its protégé's irresponsibility and worse. It began to insist that Pakistani violation of the LoC must first be terminated; other things, including the revival of the Lahore process, could come only later. The mission headed by General Zinni was blunt in delivering the message. Reports from Washington began to suggest that the US might do the hitherto unthinkable — dissuade the IMF from doling out to the nearly bankrupt Pakistan the next tranche of the

package tied up last year to 'bail out' the country in danger of becoming a 'failed state'.

Nawaz Sharif's preference, from all accounts, was to persuade America to broker a deal with India on 'safe passage' first and then on Kashmir. The US knew that even a mediatory attempt confined to the limited issue of ending the Kargil conflict would invite terse Indian rejection.

It was in this context that Nawaz had to fall back on the ser-



Nawaz Sharif stood fast with a whole lot of rabid extremists and indulged in wild anti-India rhetoric

vices of the former Pakistani foreign secretary. Niaz Naik, who is a highly accomplished and much-respected diplomat, Nawaz sent Niaz to Delhi on a super-secret mission to negotiate a deal on safe passage. But the powerful elements in the Pakistani power structure wrecked the exercise even before Niaz Naik's special aircraft could take off from Chaklala, simply by leaking the news.

The rug was thus pulled from under Sharif's feet just when he was landing in Beijing to get a red carpet treatment. The unrepentant jihadists in Islamabad are doubly happy. They have shown Nawaz his place, and he might yet try to get some comfort from the Chinese. They also hope that the OIC, meeting in the unpronounceable capital of Burkina Faso, will also give them some backing. None of this need deflect the Indian armed forces from doing their job of either driving out or decimating the invaders of Kargil. •

Bailed Out

*Sonia Gandhi helps
the Bansi Lal
government survive*

When Haryana chief minister Bansi Lal floated the Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) and got a girl-boy image as the election symbol of his party, everyone said how appropriate it was. Here was a chief minister who was promoting a small family size through the election symbol of his party. But last month, as Bansi Lal seemed set to bow out of the chief ministership of Haryana, jubilant opponents — and there were many — said with satisfaction that, at last, the rule of the girl and boy in Haryana was over. The reference was to the son and daughter of Bansi Lal, who were said to be ruling over a corrupt, inefficient and decaying HVP regime.

Bansi Lal's government went into a minority in the 90-member Haryana Assembly after its erstwhile electoral partner, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), withdrew support to his government. With 35 members in the Assembly, the HVP needed the support of at least 11 more to reach the halfway mark.

It had two choices: it could either have resigned from government and ordered fresh elections; or sought the help of the Congress in propping it up. The Congress had 12 MLAs in the House. The HVP had the additional support of eight Independents.

The Congress obliged, despite strong resistance from some quarters, notably from Bhajan Lal, who has ambitions of being chief minister of Haryana himself. In the vote of confidence last month, the party issued a whip asking its MLAs to support. The question now is: when will Bansi Lal be toppled by the Congress to instal its own candidate as chief minister. And, if the party can't do that, when



will the state be put under President's Rule.

How did things go so drastically wrong with Bansi Lal? When the HVP came to power 37 months ago, there was a general impression that Haryana's fortunes would begin to turn. A respected, even revered leader with a reputation of being an administrator who ruled with an iron hand, Bansi Lal was seen as a leader who was strict but one in whose regime it was always possible to get justice. Administrators in Haryana remembered him as the strongman of the Indian Emergency of 1975 and, in many ways, the builder of modern Haryana with its tourist and basic infrastructure.

In short, expectations were high when he took over. But halfway through his regime, public opinion plummeted. The BJP is now wondering why it didn't jettison Bansi Lal earlier, for it has been tainted by association.

Much of Bansi Lal's troubles have

Much of Bansi Lal's troubles have been created by himself. Drunk with power, heady with arrogance, he let his politician son and civil servant daughter have a free run of the state

been created by himself. Drunk with power, heady with arrogance, he let his politician son and civil servant daughter have a free run of the state. Officials say that no transfer or posting was ever done without Bansi Lal's daughter (an IAS officer and a promotee from the state civil service) having a say in it. And every major excise-collection drive — one of the most important sources of revenue for the state government — was done in consultation with the chief minister's son.

This is not to say that the sons of other state politicians — like Bhajan Lal and S.S. Surjewala — are insignificant in state politics. It was largely at the insist-



Sonia Gandhi's direct intervention saved Bansi Lal's job

ence of Kuldeep and Chander Mohan Bishnoi: Bhajan Lal's two sons, that the Congress took so long to bail Bansi Lal out. Shamsher Singh Surjewala, another Congress politician, also held out fearing his son's chances would be spiked if Bansi Lal stayed in power.

But that's another story. It was largely because of corruption, maladministration and inefficiency that Bansi Lal's government came close to falling. And a little bit of politics on the part of the BJP

When the BJP and the HVP joined up to fight the elections together, it was a tactical alliance on the basis of the belief that if the Jats, the *baniyas* and the Scheduled Castes got together, they could be an unbeatable combination.

This was proved right. With the Jats voting for the HVP and the other smaller castes voting for the BJP, the HVP-BJP alliance was firmly in place. The BJP decided to participate in the government.

This turned out to be a big mistake. Take the prohibition issue. When the HVP decided to impose prohibition, it was lauded as a great pro-women decision. Fine, except that truck after truck

laden with liquor was allowed to enter Haryana so long as it had a 'note' of Surinder Singh, Bansi Lal's son.

So, while the government lost huge amounts of revenue by the loss of excise duties levied on commercial sale of liquor, money was being made by others with impunity because of the 'special' permission. This is one reason why no liquor tragedy ever took place in Haryana. Because liquor was available, any amount of it, so long as you paid the right persons off.

Again, when those beer and liquor factories were allowed to 'reopen' after prohibition was lifted, a 'lifting fee' was levied which did not go to the state coffers either.

No one would have bothered about this, given the Indian apathy to corruption, had Bansi Lal carried out his other promises. But he failed to do so. Although one of his major election promises was to provide irrigation and power 24 hours a day, as Congress leaders pointed out, there was no electricity even four hours in a day in Haryana. For irrigation, somewhere in the middle of his regime, Bansi Lal tried to do a deal

Congress Options In Haryana

Instal a chief minister: But who? There are three contenders — Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Birender Singh and Kartari Devi. Hooda is hated by Bhajan Lal and Kartari Devi is not enough as a heavyweight, so it could be Birender Singh.

Dissolve the Assembly and get President's Rule imposed: A definite option but is this why the Congress went to such lengths to support an unpopular regime? However, it may have no other option — because Bhajan Lal will declare rebellion.

Let Bansil Lal continue: Maybe for another two years — the calculation being that in the next election, MPs supporting the Congress in the Lok Sabha would be useful. But who says Bansil Lal will win any MPs?

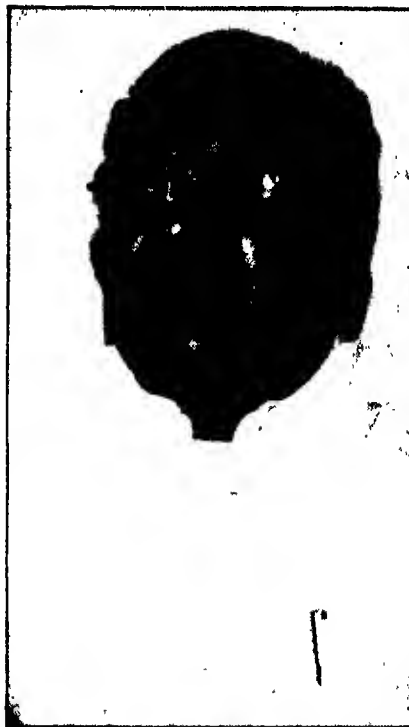
with the World Bank for irrigation schemes. But this ran into rough weather because the World Bank conveyed to the Haryana government that it would have to increase tariff and lower subsidy if it wanted any money from the World Bank either for irrigation or power.

But the main problem of Bansil Lal was the antipathy to him from the administration. Time and again, he has let the people of Haryana know that he had no sympathy for the bureaucracy which he considered the biggest thorn in the way of development. Politicians in various states use this kind of rhetoric to win popularity. In Bansil Lal's case, he actually began to believe this. As a result, bureaucrats began to lose respect for him. There was no impetus from administrators to see various schemes through. Bansil Lal's volatile temper, his intemperate language and his children's continuous interference in the administration began to demoralise bureaucrats. Raids on businessmen added to the atmosphere of insecurity.

Things reached such a pass that not just bureaucrats but even ministers began to come under constant watch of the state CID. Although two or three ministers in the government from the BJP, notably Ram Bilas Sharma and a few others, said that the BJP should continue supporting the HVP, by and large the party felt that whatever electoral chances the party had would go down the tubes if it didn't give the HVP a jolt.

In the last elections, when Om Pra-

kash Chautala, with four MPs, offered unconditional support to the BJP at the Centre, the BJP accepted this gratefully, seizing upon this opportunity to change partners. After some ups and downs (Chautala withdrew support to the BJP allegedly because of the increase in price of urea) he was persuaded to support the BJP during the vote of



Bhajan Lal was opposed to the Congress supporting Bansil Lal

confidence.

At that time itself, the BJP had decided to withdraw support to Bansil Lal. However, it took some time for the party to announce its decision. The Congress was just waiting in the wings to bail Bansil Lal out. It did so after some deliberation.

How the Congress was won over is another story. While Bhajan Lal and S.S. Surjewala were totally opposed to this move and predicted that this would cost the Congress in the next election, given Bansil Lal's unpopularity, Birender Singh and B.S. Hooda felt that this move would kill two birds with one stone: help them come into power and finish the base of Bhajan Lal and Co. within the party.

It was Sonia Gandhi's direct intervention which saved Bansil Lal's job. This was clear from the chief minister's body language while the debate on confidence in his government was going on. When the debate started, Bansil Lal (who had begged permission from the Speaker to stay seated and speak because he'd been badly ill the whole of the previous week) was sitting slumped in his chair.

Midway through the debate, envelopes were circulated among the Congress MLAs — containing the party whip issued by the chief whip on instructions from Delhi. Suddenly, Bansil Lal and all his ministers perked up and began to look energetic. In his speech, Bansil Lal roundly lambasted Atal Behari Vajpayee ("I'm going to expose everything I know about this man. .") and paid rich tributes to Sonia Gandhi ("I'm deeply grateful to Sonia Gandhi for helping us and I promise she will not be sorry. Everything in the state will be run according to her directions..."). The state CID chief confessed as much to a colleague: "*Ab to bhai jo Sonaji chahengi, wahi hoga* (From now on, what Sonaji desires will be done)."

It is hard to assess how things will develop now. Possibly, Bansil Lal will be replaced by a Congress chief minister, something he is said to be agreeable to. But this much is clear: that by jettisoning Bansil Lal, the BJP has saved face. Originally, it might have got no seats in Haryana. Now it will get at least two on its own — one, the Ambala seat, held by former Governor Suraj Bhan, is a certainty. •

Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi and Gurgaon

Selectors' dilemma

Will removing Azharuddin solve the problems of Indian cricket?



Cricket bosses have almost made up their minds to make changes not only in the Indian team, but also at the management level. Most of the officials of the Board of Control for Cricket in India are disappointed with the performance of some players while the team members and the coach contend that barring one match against Zimbabwe, performance has not been bad and it is because of faulty rules that India made an early exit from the World Cup.

It seems certain that skipper Mohammad Azharuddin will be held responsible for the debacle. One should not be surprised if he is dropped from the team before the triangular series between India, Australia and Sri Lanka at Colombo in August. Immediately after that, India will go to Singapore and Kenya for one day tournaments. The Sahara Cup is scheduled to take place from 14 September.

There is tremendous pressure on the selectors and BCCI officials to replace Azharuddin. Even in London, BCCI officials and team managers have been receiving phone calls from cricket fans that Azharuddin should be removed immediately. However, the manager and officials feel that he did nothing wrong as captain, but as a batsman he is turning out to be a spent force at 36. As selectors ponder over the fourth batsman, few of our cricket bosses want Azharuddin to be removed.

Unfortunately, nobody is willing to become captain as long as Azhar is there in the team. Even before the World Cup, Sachin Tendulkar had been offered to lead the team, but he politely declined the offer citing the same reason. He finds Azharuddin too senior to listen to him. Ajay Jadeja is also not willing to captain a team which has Azhar as a member.

In this situation, selectors have got only two options. Either retain Azharud-

din in spite of all criticisms or drop him and select a captain from amongst Tendulkar, Jadeja and Anil Kumble.

Another view that has caught the board's imagination as well as cricket lovers is that the team has a long tail. After Jadeja there is no reliable batsman, while on the other hand Pakistan has got nine good batsmen.

The performance of wicketkeeper Nayan Mongia is under scrutiny, too

team members confess that they played badly against Zimbabwe. We not only gave 51 runs as extras but also lost three wickets cheaply and could not make three runs. According to coach Anshuman Gaekwad, "Memories of the Zimbabwe match will keep haunting us throughout our life."

Selectors are also worried over the weaknesses of our bowlers. None of our pace bowlers could do much in these



Officials feel that Azhar did nothing wrong as captain, but as a batsman he is turning out to be a spent force at 36. As selectors ponder over the fourth batsman, few of them want him to go

Not only did he not do well in the World Cup as a wicketkeeper, but also as an all-rounder, while Moin Khan turned out to be an outstanding batsman. The names of M.S.K. Prasad and Vijay Dahiya are doing the rounds for Mongia's slot as also a suggestion to groom Rahul Dravid as wicketkeeper.

The Indian team requires at least seven good batsmen where it has only four—Sachin, Rahul, Sourav and Azharuddin. Among the all-rounders, only Robin Singh is doing well.

Board officials are basically upset about two matches. One against Zimbabwe and the other against Australia. Even

matches. They gave too many extras by way of wides and no-balls. Apart from this, our five bowlers could not put together more than 25 runs in any match.

The BCCI top brass, comprising president Raj Singh Dungarpur, secretary J.Y. Lele and joint secretary Jyoti Bajpai were camping in London and having consultations with International Cricket Council president Jagmohan Dalmiya. National selector Madan Lal was also watching all the matches. Let's see what changes they bring about to improve the performance of the Indian team. We cannot behave like Pakistan, where stones are pelted on players. •

Can the CPI(M) build a Third Force by strengthening the Congress?

They withdrew support from the Morarji Desai government when Jayaprakash Narayan felt they were no better than a farce. V.P. Singh trusted them, accepted them as a natural ally and, with him, they aligned with the Bharatiya Janata Party.

But that was a tactical move. As the Indian polity became more fragmented, reflecting the reality that India itself is a coalition, Communist parties in India made themselves the catalysts in building up Third Forces. Such a Third Front, comprising the communists, the Left of Centre parties and regional outfits, would have replaced both the Congress and the BJP.

However, the communists soon changed their stand and decided to ally with the Congress itself. Although H.S. Surjeet, general secretary, CPI(M), still calls himself a part of the Third Force. Only recently a correspondent asked him how the Left could be a Third Force when it was not equidistant from the First and Second forces? The veteran Marxist could not understand the question. The CPI(M) seems to believe that it is actually trying to build a Third Force by strengthening the Congress. Venkatesh Naidu, spokesperson of the BJP, says: "The CPI(M) leaders work for the Third Force by day and for the Second Force led by the Congress by night."

Communists in this country are generally thought of as unreliable. One reason is that they fail to spell out their strategies clearly because they change them too fast. In 1989, they allied with the BJP to defeat Rajiv Gandhi. Now only a decade later, they feel that even Italian-born Sonia Gandhi is fit to lead them and her lack of experience in political life (the very charge levelled against Rajiv) doesn't matter. By implication, like Congressmen, they also believe that the Nehru-Gandhi family is destined to rule the country, so it is best to forget about the charge of dynastic rule — which was levelled against Indira Gandhi when she followed in the footsteps of her father Jawaharlal Nehru and became the Prime Minister. Now they support Sonia Gan-

LEFT IN A



Jyoti Basu: Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav floated his name as PM during the last crisis at the Centre

dhi who, if she ever becomes Prime Minister, would be the fourth person from the Nehru-Gandhi household to be so.

There is no shortage of logic to justify all this. Logic No. 1. The BJP is a communal outfit, Jyoti Basu brands them as barbaric (and probably believes that uttering this hundreds of times would convince everybody that it is so). The whole party has fallen in line with this.

Logic No 2. As Prakash Karat puts it, "We are concerned with policies of foreign origin, not individuals." So the logi-

cal conclusion is — go along with Congress. However, facing a new revolt from its Kerala unit, the CPI(M) reiterates the theory of the Third Front. But at the same time, Surjeet says, "Equidistance has no meaning in the present context." The lesson is that "correlation of forces is not in our favour." Hence support the Congress.

Confused? There's more to come. The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) which is strongly anti-Sonia Gandhi, is part of the Left Front government in Kerala. The Congress(S) in Kerala has

DILEMMA



H.S. Surjeet: "Equidistance [from the First and Second fronts] has no meaning in the present context"

merged with the NCP. So how come the Left Front is allying with forces which despise Sonia Gandhi?

Yet leaders like Mulayam Singh Yadav or Laloo Prasad Yadav or Chandrababu Naidu seldom speak against the communists. It's not that in their states they can't win elections without the Left. In Andhra Pradesh or Bihar, the communists have a marginal presence. In UP it is only notional. Yet, such leaders who were in Third Front once, respect the communists. They seem to have acquired a symbolic value, although for the past 40 years they have had less than 10 per cent presence in the Lok Sabha.

Naidu, for example, hoped he would be able to revive his ties with the Left before the elections. A senior MP of the party says: "People still respect communists as a pro-poor party. Because of the Telengana movement and its legacy, its stand against the economic policies of the Congress and the fact that they are still a symbol of the people's movement though it may not be so in reality. It is only for this reason, certainly not for its vote bank, that we are always interested in the Left."

However, the communists have disowned them. Whether it is Karat or A B Bardhan (the general secretary of the CPI), they speak in the same tone. "We cannot align with the TDP this time, even if they have no ties with the BJP, because that would encourage opportunism."

However, the scenario has changed vastly. Chandrababu Naidu has few

Prakash Karat: "We are concerned with policies of foreign origin, not individuals"



options, other than having an understanding with the BJP and the Left are inching towards seat adjustment with the Congress.

As for Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Samajwadi Party supremo, he constantly floated Jyoti Basu's name as PM during the last crisis at the Centre. Why? "Jyotibabu is an experienced leader and he can give a new direction," was his answer. And for months, Surjeet and even Jyoti Basu, had abused him. But till date, the Yadav leader who spares no one has said nothing against the two veteran communist leaders. According to a close aide of the Samajwadi leader, they do not wish to appear anti-communist. For they know the value of communists in the Indian polity, respected by the minorities and the poor.

While Mulayam, till recently, was a follower of Surjeet, the other backward leader, Laloo Prasad, has always been an admirer of Jyoti Basu. He did not react even when the communists branded him corrupt and deserted him. On the contrary he has been persistent in saying that some day he hopes for a rapprochement with the communists. Which seems imminent now. A satisfied Laloo Yadav has announced that there will be an RJD-Congress-Left alliance in Bihar.

According to indications in UP, Mulayam may woo the communists but Chandrababu Naidu has given up hopes of allying with the Left. But he would not go public about his feelings concerning them. It was only Murasoli Maran, who, at the instance of his leader M. Karunanidhi, lambasted the Left on the floor of Parliament when they joined forces with his arch-rival, Jayalalitha.

This is the symbolic value of the communists. For this, at one point of time, they were admired by the BJP. Now, Sonia Gandhi feels Jyoti Basu can serve as a good advisor for her. But the communists are changing sides only at the level of parliamentary politics. They have lost their zeal for movements. They are gradually drifting away from the people. Prakash Karat recently admitted that they are not doing enough to keep up their fight on the economic front. Such a drift may rob them of their pro-poor image, resulting in a loss of their symbolic value. Caught between the twin traps of anti-communal politics and a pro-poor image, they seem to be at a loss as to how to fuse the two. •

Diptendra Ray Chaudhuri/New Delhi

APCC president Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy fights hard to shed his past

When Andhra Pradesh Congress president Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy initiated his series of corruption allegations against chief minister Chandra-babu Naidu, he naturally expected a reprisal. What he did not expect was the swiftness, accuracy and volubility with which the counter-attack came.

A 150-page well-written and well-documented tome from the Telugu Desam Party office not just countered the charges effectively, it listed in detail the histories of YSR, his father Y.S. Raja Reddy and his friends.

For Reddy, this digging of his past has come at the worst possible time. Assembly elections are due in the state — Kargil permitting — sometime in October and as of now, the situation is delicately balanced. Naidu has introduced widespread reforms in AP that go much deeper than the much-hyped IT boom. But it is impossible to assess if they have been successful with the rural voter. In addition, after five years in office Naidu must expect an anti-incumbency factor working against him.

This is cheerful news for the Congress and particularly so for Reddy for whom the next election will be a landmark. And anything that veers the road from his chosen direction can be disastrous for him.

Reddy has many things to prove this time. When Indira Gandhi picked him up as AP Congress chief in 1983, he had basked in the glory of being the chosen one. He had the distinction of being the youngest party chief ever in a state known for its octogenarian leaders and hoped to lead the Congress to victory in the 1984 Lok Sabha polls. But that was not to be. A coup in the TDP by Nadendla Bhaskara Rao, who toppled the immensely popular N.T. Rama Rao, changed the scales altogether.

So when most of India returned the Congress to power on a sympathy vote for Rajiv Gandhi after his mother's assassination, the state gave NTR a thumping majority. The TDP won 32 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra

Up agains



A TDP dossier listed in detail the histories of YSR, his father and his friends. For Reddy, this digging of his past has come at the worst possible time, with Assembly elections due in October

Pradesh, to become the largest Opposition party in Parliament. And bucking the all-India trend, the Congress in AP managed a pitiful six Lok Sabha seats.

This drubbing continued in the mid-term Assembly elections of 1985 when the Congress tally came down from 60 to 50 MLAs in a House of 294. Reddy won his Pulivendula constituency, but as PCC chief, lost face.

If he loses the 1999 elections, he would have performed a hat-trick in

reverse — leading the Congress to defeat three times in a row. It could mean the end of his career in Congress and certainly relegated to 12th man, he might only get a distant view of the chief minister's office window from the locker room. For a man of YSR's ambitions, that would be both a political and personal disaster.

Besides, Rajasekhara Reddy has other rubicons to cross. His career within

t himself



Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy: YSR's nemesis

the Congress can, most charitably, be described as chequered

The TDP paper on him hit a sore spot when it said that his behaviour against Naidu was "in keeping with his reputation of being a compulsive and according to some, demented letter writer...he has earlier addressed several such letters against, among others, P V Narasimha Rao, Dr M Channa Reddy, N Janardhan Reddy and Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy"

Reddy has risen quickly in the Congress ranks. He started with student politics in the Karnataka University Medical College, came home to Cuddapah to work in a mission hospital -- a job that did not suit his temperament; shifted over to private practice in a year but remained discontent. He finally found his vocation with the shift to the Youth Congress in 1974. From there to Youth Congress general secretary, to MLA in 1978 and then a minister in T. Anjiah's Cabinet in 1980 was a matter of a few years.

But the road has been long and littered with political vendetta. In 1989, he supported Janardhan Reddy's candidature for chief ministership but the high command installed Channa Reddy. In 1990, after severe communal riots in

Hyderabad, Channa Reddy was dislodged and Janardhan Reddy was made CM. But then YSR fell out with his own candidate. He is believed to be behind the famous renaming of Janardhan Reddy as "Dhanarjan Reddy" for allegedly making "a crore a day" in bribes.

When Janardhan Reddy bit the dust in turn, YSR was a serious contender for the CM's office himself. But Delhi sent Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy instead.

Chandrababu Naidu: effective rebuttal



That was probably the most politically bitter time for YSR. He went on record saying, "Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy was leading a pack of goons." J.C. Diwakar Reddy, a Cabinet minister, at a press conference called YSR "a stinking pile of refuse". This led to slippers being thrown at a public meeting being addressed by Narasimha Rao and the CM.

The sordid episode culminated with Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy, also head of the Congress disciplinary committee at Delhi, issuing a show-cause notice for anti-party activities to YSR along with Bangarappa in Karnataka. Bangarappa later left the Congress but YSR hung on.

In Congress parlance, this would be the mark of a permanent dissident. A man whose political rivalry has centred more on his own partymen than on the Opposition. To this Reddy says: "I have a habit of talking straight, even if it was the Congress that was pursuing anti-people policies."

Given the Congress party's track record in AP, that sounds credible. But for one thing -- his own and his family's long history in police stations all over Cuddapah district, with charges ranging from murder to burning of hallot boxes galore.

It is not for nothing that he is called the Cuddapah Tiger. YSR's father, Raja Reddy, was a small-time farmer who migrated to the district in the Sixties and began a haryes mining business. Accused of killing his partner to take over the lucrative firm -- a charge that Reddy denies naturally -- he became the head of one of the three families that controlled all mining in Cuddapah. That is how the mining feud between the three families started and with YSR's entry spilled over to politics.

It also began the contemporary mythos of violence in Cuddapah. Bombing each other's houses, killing kin and followers for minor slights, intimidation of villagers, government officers and the police alike -- the gory present of the entire region that has spawned innumerable movies. Incidentally, these are the only films in which the heroes are policemen who stand up against feuding leaders.

And more than the challenge of the TDP, this is what YSR is up against: his roots, his own partymen, his reputation as a dissident and a man with a long criminal record. And that makes this the toughest fight of his life -- when a man is up against himself. •

Sarita Rani/Hyderabad

*Did Venkataraghavan
refuse to umpire the
Pakistan-Australia
match due to
fundamentalist
intimidation?*

After its debacle in the World Cup, the Indian cricket team has fallen in the eyes of its diehard fans. But there is some good news for the followers of the game: a former Indian captain and now a leading umpire, Srinivas Venkataraghavan, has done us proud.

Venkat as he is better known, a National Grid International Cricket Council panel umpire, got the highest grading at the World Cup. He was one of the six umpires who officiated in the super six stage, including the match between South Africa and Australia at Headingley and also the thrilling semi-final between them at Edgbaston.

According to a top functionary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, "Venkat got the top marks. He was ahead of England's David Shepherd and West Indies' Steve Bucknor. He was ICC's first choice for the final and his appointment was officially made, but because of sensitive reasons (Pakistan was one of the teams in the final), Venkat backed out. So, the ICC was forced to make him the third TV umpire, even though both the team captains, Steve Waugh and Wasim Akram, had put Venkat as their first preference."

When India and Pakistan were virtually at war in Kargil, Venkat would have been aware of the grave implications of any decisions that he might have handed down in such a crucial match. A former cricketer close to him said, "In the finals, Inzamam-ul Haq was given out caught behind by umpire David Shepherd, though TV replays clearly showed Inzamam's bat was nowhere near the ball. That decision really was a major blow to Pakistan who crumbled later for 132. Now if Venkat had given that decision there would have been riots."

According to sources, a few days before the final, Venkat's wife Ranjani received a threatening call in the dead of the night. The caller reportedly said that they would "take care of Venkat" if he

Threat perception



"It is a personal decision not to officiate in the final. I have no comments to make," Venkat said. However, he might have thought that a simple error of judgement by him could be interpreted as "Indian intervention"

officialiated in the final.

Venkat, however, told SUNDAY, "It is a personal decision not to officiate in the final. I have no comments to make." He might have had in mind the fuss made in the hockey World Cup match between India and Korea in which Pakistani umpire Irfan Zaidi officiated. That was a year ago when the political situation was not so volatile. This time, it Venkat made a simple error of judgement, some quarters might have raised a hue and cry about "Indian intervention".

The Karunanidhi government in Tamil Nadu has been trying its best to check the growth of Muslim fundamentalist organisations.

Those involved in the Coimbatore blasts before Union home minister L. K. Advani's visit are all behind bars. The accused mainly belong to the Al-Umma group, whose leader S A Basha is said to have links with the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence.

Basha was running his organisation from jail through half a-dozen cellphones and a network of committed young men. When the jail wardens further cracked down on them by not allowing visitors and mail or even keeping them in solitary confinement, they became violent. A splinter group of the Al-Umma, Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetta Kazhagam (TMMK), started a campaign against the state police and the DMK government saying they were ill-treating Muslims in jail.

Meanwhile, there was a huge haul of explosives near the police headquarters in Chennai. Tiruchi and Coimbatore. Chief minister Karunanidhi said the state government suspected ISI's involvement in the planting of bombs. He added that preliminary reports indicated the involvement of some fundamentalist groups including the banned Al-Umma.

The Muslims, on the other hand, say that they are being targeted by the Karunanidhi government who they feel have become BJP stooges. The basic reason for Muslim disillusionment with Karunanidhi is that he has aligned himself with the BJP for the next elections. This is quite unthinkable as Basha had once remarked: "Karunanidhi is the only true secular Indian politician." In Tamil Nadu, the Muslim vote has been with the DMK all these years.

Now suddenly Jayalalitha is trying to emerge as the new "secular heroine" who till the other day was in the BJP

camp. Jayalalitha started dishing out statements highly critical of the DMK-BJP stand on Muslims. She even went to the extent of saying that "the DMK government had planted the bombs to bring disrepute to Muslims." Then, she was stumped when the state police interrogated her in the light of her allegation.

A smear campaign was launched against Karunanidhi and the state government through pamphlets. The

the DMK had approached the TMMK for support in the ensuing parliamentary elections but the latter strongly objected to the DMK's alliance with the BJP. He said that the TMMK would organise a conference in Chennai on 4 July which would be attended by Jayalalitha and Congress leaders. He said that there was tremendous pressure on the state police by the chief minister to ban TMMK and also deny permission for the conference.



Karunanidhi: losing Muslim support

Intelligence Bureau warned that Karunanidhi and his son M K. Stalin, the mayor of Chennai, and a few others were on the hit list of an "extremist group" and then security should be upgraded to Z-plus level.

In a sensational disclosure, Karunanidhi also said that "TMMK has links with the ISI. Its leader Jaffarullah was a member of SIMI (Students Islamic Movement of India), which propagated that Islam is the sole religion and preached the use of violence." Added Karunanidhi: "I shudder to think that such elements are present amidst the peace-loving Muslim community."

The TMMK hit back, when its president Jaffarullah went on a tirade against the chief minister for his remarks linking his party with the ISI and attributed the motive to "election fever". He said

Interestingly, Karunanidhi seemed to have wooed Basha. The prime accused in the RSS office bomb blast case told the press on the Madras High Court premises, as he was being brought to the court. "There will be no further bomb explosion and indulgence in violence by Al-Umma cadre. The decision has been taken in the interest of the society and the nation." Karunanidhi has welcomed the statement.

Meanwhile, Muslim fundamentalist groups have started raking up the Kargil issue. Shajahan, brother-in-law of Mohammed Ansari, one of the key accused in the Coimbatore blasts, and Abu Dahir were found distributing a Tamil tabloid, *Seidh Madal*, containing an article titled 'Kashmir — Kosovo of India'. •

Sreedhar Pillai/Chennai



Snuff it out!

Members of the UN, the government and NGOs get together for a drug-free world

All it takes is just one sniff, one puff, one intravenous injection and a temporary high to become a lifetime addict of illicit drugs.

The regional offices of the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the United Nations Information Centre organised a panel discussion in Delhi on 26 June, observed as international day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

Concerned about the increased use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, Asha Das, secretary, ministry of social justice and empowerment, reflected, "In the last decade or so, the problem of drug abuse and alcoholism has become a serious cause for concern in the country." Among the various reasons cited by her for this upward trend in drug abuse were modernisation, collapse of the joint family system, easy access to information about people's lifestyles and value systems in other countries.

Devender Dutt, deputy director general with the narcotics control bureau, pointed out that India's geographical position makes it all the more vulnerable, located as it is between two major drug-producing areas, the Golden Crescent (Pakistan, Afghanistan) on the west and the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos and Thailand) on the East. Opium

and heroin are smuggled into India from the border areas. "In India, the cultivation of opium is confined to the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan," revealed R. Bhattacharya, Narcotics Commissioner.

Abdul Latif, representative of UNDCP regional office for south Asia, spoke on the role of precursor chemicals — ingredients used by traffickers to illicitly manufacture drugs like heroin, cocaine and LSD. Often pharmaceutical, leather and textiles industries require to use these chemicals, acetic anhydride, for example, in bulk. Drug traffickers obtain precursor chemicals by foul means, usually by diverting them from laboratories. Since 1993, acetic anhydride and two other precursors have been declared 'controlled substances' by the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act. Restrictions have also been imposed on the import and export of the chemical.

Speaking about the changing context of drug abuse in India, Anand Bordia, joint secretary in the ministry of social justice and empowerment, pointed out that earlier drug abuse was a problem of the affluent sections of society. "But now, it is entering into the slums and being used by the poorer sections. This is already a disadvantaged section and

the use of drugs push them further into disadvantage," he said.

Jimmy Dorabjee of SHARAN, a treatment and rehabilitation centre for drug users, stressed on social deprivation as a key factor that leads people to use drugs. Suggesting methods to prevent drug abuse, he said, "We need to go to the drug user or the potential user, present them with accurate information about drug use and the harmful effects of drugs and let them make informed choices." About rehabilitation of drug addicts he said that instead of the usual pattern of detoxification followed by rehabilitation, a more desirable sequence would be offering rehabilitation before detoxification. That way we are accepting the abuser back into the society without any preconditions and giving him a greater will to cure himself.

The need of the hour, undoubtedly, is to spread maximum awareness about the danger of drugs. Simply stated, drugs can kill people. To quote from the message of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, "Drugs continue to blight and indeed destroy far too many lives." And most often what stands between life and what can be a painful death is just that one sniff, one puff... •

Garima Kaira/New Delhi



FLOP SHOW

Theatres screening Bengali films close down at an alarming rate

The Bengali cinema industry, where crises are a dime a dozen, is now faced with its worst crisis in recent years. While a steady stream of outstation producers continue to converge on Tollygunge, theatres screening Bengali films are closing down at an alarming rate.

West Bengal has over 800 permanent and temporary cinema halls, spread thinly over the entire state. In Calcutta and its suburbs alone, 56 halls have closed down over the past few years and another seven may well down their shutters soon.

Among those that have closed is Rupahant, so christened by Rabindranath Tagore, reportedly to make way for an air-conditioned market. Janata cinema has been converted into a newspaper office, Rupam is now a multi-storied building, Lotus, Dipti and Bunty are closed and Opera, in central Calcutta, is set to become a commercial establishment, perhaps a hotel. Gem and Mini-Gem have shut shop as well.

Some halls are allegedly being kept open 'forcefully' by their employees. Indira, in the south, is being run by its staff. It could close in a few months, along with several others running at a loss.

For theatre owners the going will be even tougher in the days ahead. Early in June, employees struck work claiming theatre owners had reneged on an agreement on enhanced wages and better working conditions arrived at last year. All cinema houses were closed for a day and a threat of further agitation was issued.

The owners, on the other hand, allege that the agreement cannot be acted on until the state government fulfils its part of the bargain which included rationalisation and reduction of taxes and lowering of tariffs. Since neither side is prepared to concede any ground, the government has stepped in to arrive at a solution through dialogue.

But even if an amicable settlement is worked out, the gloomy picture is not likely to change. Only a couple of cinema houses showing Bengali movies are air-conditioned. Hence the reluctance of the audience to visit them. The government's failure in containing the spread of illegal video parlours is another deterrent.

There is a law forbidding video projection of a movie until a certain time has elapsed after its commercial release. But this does not deter illegal transfer from celluloid to tape. The state administra-



Two of the 56 closed cinema halls



tion has shown a singular lack of enterprise in curbing this activity. Parlours are cheaper to visit and, although it is a largely male audience, the owners can't complain because the cost of a pirated cassette can be recovered from a single show.

The number of 'flops' are increasing at an alarming rate. However, Sree Panchanan, a publicist who has been in the business for almost half a century, feels filmmakers themselves are to blame. "How can they expect to succeed if they make a rehash of a rehash? A pile of videos are seen and scenes are clipped from several of them to make a new script. This and the continuous repeti-

tion of the same old faces are encouraging people to ignore Bengali films. With good scripts and fresh faces, there is no reason why Bengali films shouldn't do well."

Curiously, several producers from Bombay and the South are making Bengali films in the time of recession. Prakash Mehra and Issa Sajjad have got films like *Madhur Milan* and *Kulangaar* on stream. Harish Shah has featured Prem Chopra in *Tok Mishu Jiban*, producer-director Partha Ghosh has announced three films, Ramoji Rao has made *Jamai No. 1* and Rama Naidu has completed *Ashookh* directed by Rituparno Ghosh and *Shudhu Ekbar Balo* with Prashant Roy.

Ramoji Rao, of course, plans to stay on. His Bengali satellite channel will be beamed from 15 August. But it is highly unlikely that others would want to invest again. *Jamai No. 1*, for example, flopped badly.

Bengali cinema today is being sustained by its rural audience. But once cable TV reaches the countryside, it is difficult to see Bengali movies in their present format succeeding or even being sustained.

In the meantime, movie hall owners are preferring to shut shop and opt for commercial high-rises. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta

*Sending news
despatches from
Kargil can be as
challenging as
fighting a war*



Kargil is India's first 'TV' war. Excitement rises as we watch on the TV screen the zooming planes, the fiery bomb attacks and the hardy soldiers fighting

a difficult war. The wounded and the dead add an element of pathos. The duller part is, of course, the official briefings by the ministry of defence. Unfortunately, most publications had to rely a lot on the briefings.

To make a similar impact, the print media correspondents had to possess initiative, do their homework and write with clarity. Unfortunately, there are not many Cornelius Ryans (famous American war correspondent who later wrote *The Longest Day*) in Indian journalism. Yet *Outlook* came out with some good stories, including the one on the deaths of the brave soldiers and the impact on their families. The pictorial depiction of the 'War in Kargil' was also good. *Outlook's* estimate of the daily cost of the war at Rs 30 lakh, however, appeared to be on the lower side.

Sanjay Halarnkar and Harinder Baweja (*India Today*) produced a readable story on our war heroes, embellished with excellent pics. Serious of the story were a bit too melodramatic, but the overall effect was good. The coverage was full of intense human interest, a factor which is missed out by most of our reporters. *India Today* did well to focus on the impact of war on the Indian economy and make a comparative study with Pakistan. *Sunday* roped in Inder Malhotra who always writes with clarity to comment on why we failed to foresee and forestall the game plan of Islamabad on the border conflict. Warned Malhotra, "Eternal vigilance is not only the price of liberty but also of a country's integrity and security."

Covering a war, fought on an inhospitable terrain is not easy. Gaurav Sawant (*The Indian Express*) explained that hacks had a battle on their hands,

News from

just to survive and to send their despatches. Very little food and water. Primitive communication facilities. M.J. Akbar (*Asian Age*), from his front-page reports headlined 'The Cutting Edge', revealed he had arranged to travel in helicopters with the army top brass most of the time which spoke well of his initiative. Akbar, an old hand in Indo-Pak relations and Kashmir, explained that Pakistan had not basically changed its strategy in sending its own troops into our territory and calling them 'freedom fighters'. This time, most of the world saw through the ruse and Pak credibility was low.

The government briefings and the personnel it chose to explain the war to the media, gave one the impression that only the North was involved in it. Kuldip Nayar in *The Indian Express* was upset that the government failed totally in informing non-BJP governments about the progress of the war. Assam chief minister, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta complained he followed the war through TV and the print media! According to Nayar, Assam was taken for granted

because the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) was not part of the ruling front at the Centre. When Mahanta rang up home minister Advani, all he got was the laconic reply, "Let me see if I can do anything."

Kuldip Nayar pointed out that Jawaharlal Nehru informed the chief ministers regularly on the progress of the skirmishes with China in 1962. Today, the job could be entrusted to the defence minister, argues Nayar. "The defence minister has all the time to give interviews to the Press and TV and say things which he should not. And there is no secrecy involved. If the Army Chief of Staff can brief the BJP executive, he can surely brief the Chief ministers on the



***Outlook* came out with
a good human interest
story on the deaths of
brave soldiers. *India
Today* did well to focus
on the impact of war
on Indian economy**



the Front

war situation, if they assemble in Delhi." After all, the Kargil war involved the entire nation, not just the BJP coalition government in Delhi.

Calling for a pragmatic attitude towards Pakistan, Hari Jaisingh, editor of *The Tribune*, criticised our emotional attitude and response. He found the Pakistan leaders pragmatic and focussed, all the time certain of their priorities. Wrote, Hari Jaisingh, "Pakistan's Kargil operation is yet another example of how its leaders camouflaged their real intention amidst diplomacy of 'smile and sweet reasonableness'. General Zia was a past master in this art. And Mr Nawaz Sharif, I understand, considers him his role model in dealing with India." Jai-

singh was also disturbed at the increasing signs of Talibanisation of Pakistan and warned that a Talibanised Pakistan would pose serious problems not only in India but also to American-sponsored peace moves in the region.

But then religious fundamentalism is not the monopoly of Pakistan. Our own RSS called for nuclear attacks on Pakistan. Condemning this attitude, *The Times* sharply criticised the saffron bombshell and pointed out that those who advocated the use of the bomb should reflect on the consequences of such a senseless action on our cities. "Obviously, the BJP has failed to educate the Sangh Parivar on the philosophy of Indian nuclear deterrence. The *Panchajanya* editorial against Pakistan in a stab in the back far worse than what the Pakistanis had done in Kargil", said the *Times*.

The Opposition, the media and the people of India, are naturally disturbed at such thinking and also at the clout enjoyed by the RSS in the Sangh Parivar. There is now increasing evidence that the Kargil war is being fought as a 'BJP war'. The Opposition was entirely justified in demanding that Kargil be made a national issue and that the Rajya Sabha should be summoned for a special session for a national debate. *The Times* and *The Indian Express* in their editorials lent support to this demand. The BJP attitude reflected a split India, a sentiment which would be welcomed by the enemy. It could lead Pakistan generals to believe, and quite justifiably too, that Indian political leaders, were more interested in scoring debating points against one another than fight the war unitedly. Kargil involved the entire nation and should be debated in the Rajya Sabha.

Hype and tripe

Can there be life after the World Cup, cricket lovers must be asking themselves? But there is also the feeling that Indian media had overplayed the cricket hype. Gurjit Singh Jaidka in a letter addressed to the editor, *The Pioneer*, lamented that for ever a month his favourite paper had disappeared from the

public eye and was replaced by the 'Cricket Pioneer'. Wrote Jaidka, "Only a few cricket fans opted for the 'Cricket Pioneer'. Others assumed that *The Pioneer* had stopped publication."

The letter writer, I feel, had a point. But the entire media created a situation as though only the World Cup mattered. *The Times of India* went on carrying silly front-page interviews with starlets, politicians, businessmen (only gangsters were not considered) on what they thought of cricket and the World Cup. Anyone and everyone was game for a write-up including one Mr B.P. Bam who, we were informed, was a 'former official of the Intelligence Bureau currently engaged in setting up a sports academy in Nask where due emphasis would be placed on mental training on players belonging to different disciplines'. Phew!

Most of the cricket coverage was banal and repetitive. Why rope in dozens of former test players who said the same things over and over again. The most unreadable coverage came from Sanjay Manjrekar, Harsha Bhogle, Ravi Shastri while Chidanand Rajghatta (*The Indian Express*), Ayaz Memon (*Mid-Day*), Geoff Boycott and Michael Holding were to the point and readable. Readers of *The Week* magazine, when polled, did not want Azharuddin as the captain. *The Week* editor T.R. Gopalakrishnan in his column 'Last World' suggested scrapping five-day tests and holding major one-day tournaments including the World Cup only in the subcontinent. The editor, obviously, did not follow cricket, particularly some of the most recent enthralling test series — India vs Pakistan, West Indies vs Australia and South Africa vs West Indies. One-day *tamasha's* can never replace test cricket.

Let me confess. After watching almost all the matches on TV and reading all that stuff in print media, I still do not know why Pakistan played so badly in the final. We were told that Pakistan had flair. Why and where did the flair disappear on 20 June? Why didn't a single Pakistani batsman stand up to the Australian attack? Why did Wasim Akram and his men give up the battle as soon as their innings had ended and made no attempts to delay the inevitable by securing more Australian wickets. The hundreds of correspondents and 'experts' who covered the World Cup had no answers to these queries. •



The third eye

Cricket decisions need an innovative technological touch

One worry soccer officials don't have is the weather. For cricket, however, it is an important factor and one that could determine the fate of a championship. The seventh World Cup saw India crashing out even before it had played its last match because rain washed out the New Zealand-Zimbabwe tie despite an extra day scheduled to complete it.

This is one aspect that needs to be considered while scheduling future competitions. England in May can be bitingly cold as well, making it difficult for players to grip the ball in dark conditions. June would have been ideal for players and spectators alike.

But weather is just one of the factors. Cricket is a prosperous entertainment business today. Around Rs 600 crore went into the marketing of the event and

associated merchandise. It is essential that the game be conducted in a fool-proof manner so that errors and omissions are eliminated and a match is seen to be conducted fairly.

For this, electronic assistance (or is it surveillance?) is essential. A beginning has certainly been made. Today, very few umpires take unilateral decisions on run-outs. The matter is usually referred to the third umpire who arrives at a decision after carefully studying slow-motion replays from at least two angles. Wrong decisions on this aspect have almost completely been eliminated barring rare instances where the camera view has been obstructed for some reason.

Another welcome addition has been the reduction of sledging, because the

equipment in the middle stump include camera and sound. Fielders who find pleasure in abusing, teasing or generally trying to break the batsman's concentration now find it difficult to gain unethical advantage because their words would carry. People most upset by this are, of course, the Australians, who seem to revel in gamesmanship at the expense of sportsmanship.

But there are several areas of the game that need an innovative technological touch. Take the case of a caught behind for instance. This has always remained a debatable issue, with few batsmen willing to walk back to the pavilion of their own accord. On the other hand, wicketkeepers and close-in fielders are wont to appeal loudly the moment the ball passes anywhere near the bat on the way to his gloved adversary.

The ball could also go to a fielder. This happened in a match that could well have propelled South Africa to the final at the expense of Australia. Captain Hansie Cronje's bat did not touch the ball as it hit his toe and went to Mark Waugh. He was adjudged caught, just when he looked set for a workmanlike innings. The match would surely not have been tied, had he been allowed to play on.

Some method will have to be devised to study the angle, velocity and height of the ball after it touches the pads and up to the distance from there to the wicket. With today's technology this isn't too difficult a proposition. Again, the machinery should be with the third umpire for a speedy—and indisputable—decision.

There cannot be too many mourners over the diminishing importance of the umpires on the field. The day television replays were used for adjudging run-outs—and fielding on the boundary, for that matter—it was clear that machines would ultimately have to take the most crucial decisions.

After all, it's not just pride that people play for, nowadays. There are megabucks to be earned on the pitch. And these shouldn't be left to subjective judgement. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta



Hansie Cronje: victim of an error?



SUDDEN DEATH: the scene at New Jalpaiguri station moments after the blast

WEST BENGAL

The big bang

A powerful bomb, planted allegedly by the ISI, kills nine people in New Jalpaiguri railway station

The boys from Gorkha Rifles were raring to go. Their big day had come. On their way to Kargil, the *jawans* were itching for some real action. Little did they know that the fireworks would begin at home. And shortly after 12 noon on 22 June, three of their comrades lay in tatters on Platform No.2 of New Jalpaiguri (NJP) railway station in north Bengal after a powerful explosion ripped through the station. Five people died on the spot and four more died in hospital. Nearly 65 were admitted to nearby hospitals with injuries.

After the dust settled, it was more or less clear that the army men were the prime targets. Around 25 soldiers were waiting at the station to board the Delhi-bound Mahananda Express. According to police and intelligence sources, the bomb was kept in a brief-case, right next to the spot where the Gorkha Rifles' men had assembled. The device was powerful enough to blow off the platform roof. Later, an eight-inch-deep crack was found on the floor of Platform No 2.

The shrapnel pierced the metal coaches of Mahananda

Express and Darjeeling Mail which was parked on the facing platform. Two bodies were charred beyond recognition. As panic-stricken people started fleeing the spot, railway employees, hawkers, policemen and local people, along with voluntary organisations, started rescue operations. The explosion could be heard as far as Siliguri town located 5 km away from NJP station.

It was clear that the NJP blast was not an isolated incident. On 20 June, another blast had taken place on the railway tracks at Falakata in Dooars. Two powerful bombs were also discovered on the railway tracks. But these did not shake the administration out of stupor.

This, in a way, was West Bengal's initiation into modern-day terrorism. Earlier, a few landmines were used for ambushing paramilitary forces in the hills of Darjeeling during the height of the Gorkhaland movement. It is now certain that RDX explosives along with remote control device were deployed at NJP station. Authorities are more or less certain that it was the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)

which was behind the blast and that their aim was to disrupt the movement of troops to J&K.

ISI presence in north Bengal is an open secret now. In the past one year, all the concerned authorities — state and central intelligence bigwigs, the army intelligence and even the state home (police) minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee — have been vocal about the presence of pro-Pakistani subversive elements in north Bengal, especially Siliguri. Intelligence agencies have reportedly been filing reports regularly on possible ISI activities in north Bengal. It now appears that despite the reports, the incident could not be prevented.

It is true that Siliguri's location has made the town a haven for outlawed militant organisations. The town has international boundary with both Nepal and Bangladesh. And Bhutan is not far away. As per international treaties, anyone from Nepal and Bhutan can enter into India and vice versa. On the other hand, despite the vigil along the India-Bangladesh border by the BSF, illegal immigration from Bangladesh goes on.

Much of this illegal movement involves smuggling of contraband goods from Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Smuggled foreign goods are sold in the open market. Being located at the crossroads, Siliguri is also a transit point for international smugglers, poachers and racketeers dealing in narcotic drugs.

Given the scenario, it is not difficult for anyone to acquire sophisticated arms and explosives. Security agencies have hard intelligence on the clandestine arms bazaar in Siliguri. According to sources, members of Assam's outlawed groups often come down to Siliguri with their shopping list which features AK-47 rifles, carbines etc. which come from Nepal.

Two years ago, the police had picked up three suspicious characters from Siliguri and seized a brand new US-made carbine along with pistols and ammunitions. But the three were mere couriers. The kingpin was never located and the enquiry was stalled reportedly at the behest of 'some powerful political leader'. Despite the tell-tale evidence, the authorities, for reasons known to themselves, have not taken measures to disturb the apple-cart.

There is no doubt that the Union home ministry had alerted the state government on ISI activities in north Bengal. It was pointed out that ISI agents would start subversive activities in the form of bomb blasts at different places, including Siliguri. It appears that the Left Front government did not pay heed to the words of caution.

On 4 January this year, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee told newsmen that he had definite information that ISI agents were trying to disturb peace around Siliguri and that such plans were being made from Kathmandu. A week before Bhattacharjee's remark, the police arrested 13 people for their alleged links with the ISI. Among them were two local boys, Mohammed Nawab (25) and Mohammed Gulab (27). The rest were Pak-hun money-lenders based in Siliguri.

Later it was revealed that the main suspect, Sher Khan, was able to hoodwink the cops. Way back in 1995, the police in Bihar had arrested Sher Khan for his suspected links with the ISI. Moreover, in December last year, a Bangladeshi named Abu Naser Ahmed was arrested in Calcutta for his ISI links. Abu incidentally moved to Calcutta from Siliguri.

The blast in Siliguri has brought to the fore an open secret: that even with timely intelligence, the police and the security apparatus in the state is woefully inadequate to stand up to organisations like the ISI. •

Iva Guha/Siliguri

UTTAR PRADESH

Lend me your ears

Sonia Gandhi's speech at Varanasi was well received

Was Sonia Gandhi silent on the Kargil issue because she was looking for the right moment to speak out? And what could be a better occasion to raise the matter than launching her party's election campaign? The meeting at Varanasi — the centre of Hindu learning — came in handy for the Congress president to give a fitting reply to the much hyped-up "foreigner" campaign against her.

Speaking at the well-attended rally, Sonia blamed a weak Centre for the goings-on along the LoC at Kargil. "Today, Pakistan has dared to penetrate into our land and is attempting to forcibly occupy our territory," she told the gathering at Varanasi's Benia Bagh ground. She also issued a warning to Pakistan: "Let it be known to all that whatever be the differences with our political rivals over domestic issues, we are all one on the question of India's unity and prestige."

To make it clear to the BJP that she was in no mood to give the party a clean chit, Sonia went on to add: "We have several questions to ask on Kargil, but we will do so at an appropriate time; and we will see to it that this government replies to these questions." No doubt, for the Congress, Kargil is going to be a key election issue.

Her emphasis on "we all are *Bharatiyas*" was a subtle mes-

Waiting for Pinter

A PIL challenges the police version about the disappearance of a 14-year-old boy in Siliguri

When Pinter Yadav (14) and his cousin Manjit Gowala (9) took a bus from their north Bengal village to Siliguri town on 5 May, they thought they were going to see a movie and have a good time. But horror movies seldom show such violence as they went through. And worse, Pinter never came back to his widowed mother.

What happened to him? A public-interest petition filed by Tapas Chakravarty, general secretary of the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR), has raised this question before the Calcutta High Court. On 23 June, a Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Satyabrata Sinha and Justice M.H.S. Ansari directed the superintendent of police, Darjeeling district, and the officer-in-charge, Pradhannagar outpost, to submit affidavits within two weeks in this regard.

The police was not being dragged into this case simply because they had failed to trace a minor and ensure his security even after six weeks of his disappearance. It is, in fact, the police who were accused of detaining Pinter illegally and torturing him — his family is now almost resigned to

sage to the BJP that on the question of nation's security and integrity, she was fully behind the very government whose leaders had accused her of being a "foreigner".

The message seems to have gone down well with the crowd which had gathered despite the infighting in UP Congress. "What a shame it was to label such a woman as foreigner," observed Gyanwati, a 65-year-old Congress enthusiast who had come from the outskirts of Varanasi. "Please tell me, by what logic is Sonia Gandhi still a foreigner? She had been married on this soil for nearly 30 years, she wears Indian clothes,

GAINING GROUND: Sonia Gandhi at the Varanasi rally



PRADEEP SHAW

the painful thought — to death.

In this gory tragedy, the only witness who is forthcoming till now is Manjit. The sequence of events, reconstructed on the basis of his account, is like this.

Soon after the two boys got down at the Tenzing Norgay bus stand, Siliguri, they were accosted by two plainclothesmen with lathis in their hands. They asked the kids why they were loitering around, and without waiting for answers, accused them of being thieves.

HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW: Pinter Yadav



she thinks about this nation like any other Indian and, above all, she speaks our language quite well," asked Gyanwati's young daughter Sushma.

There was a marked improvement in Sonia's diction and speech delivery. She was also making no bones about launching her party's election campaign from Varanasi. Apart from raising the question of a "weak Centre", Sonia did not miss the opportunity to tell the crowd that the Congress alone was in a position to take the nation out of its ills by providing India with a stable and strong government.

Even as the question of "real success" of the rally is being hotly debated in Congress circles — particularly by UPCC president Salman Khurshid's detractors — political observers do not see a silver lining in Sonia's visit to Varanasi. If the idea was to woo the Brahmins and Muslims — who dominate the population of this ancient Hindu city — the Congress president surely succeeded in striking a new chord with them.

Thanks to UPCC president Salman Khurshid, she was urged to unveil the statue of the late Kamlapati Tripathi, Varanasi's one-time stalwart. Though held in high esteem by the city's large Brahmin population, no one had thought, in all these years, of installing Tripathi's statue in the city.

"Soniji's forays into UP are bound to make all the difference; the more she tours the neglected parts, the more we would gain," feels Khurshid. Sonia's schedule seems to suggest she is keen on concentrating on eastern UP. Her rally on 28 June is scheduled at Mau which is barely 80 km from Varanasi. Mau belongs to one of the poorest areas in UP. If Sonia can fire the imagination of these people, Congress can hope to regain a lot of political ground, ceded to the BJP on the Kargil issue. •

Sharat Pradhan/Varanasi

They were taken to the nearby Pradharnagar outpost and given a good thrashing. Although the younger one was left to watch the violence after a few blows, the older brother got it rather heavy. Twice in the presence of Manjit, Pinter was kicked and beaten with lathis. As a result, he started vomiting blood and fell seriously ill.

That was the last time Manjit saw him. The younger boy was subsequently taken on a scooter by two policemen to the Siliguri police station and locked up.

Meanwhile, as the children did not return, their family members became worried. Their mothers and grandmother went to Siliguri to search for them, and after running from pillar to post, discovered young Manjit at the Siliguri thana lock-up. They got him 'released' with the help of a court clerk on 11 May.

But there was no trace of Pinter. The policemen at the outpost and the *thana* gave the family members various stories at various times. Initially, they just denied any knowledge of the boys. Then they said the kids had been brought with injuries to the outpost by some unidentified 'people', who were 'advised' by the police to take them to a hospital. Even as Manjit was found at the Siliguri *thana* lock-up, Pinter's guardians were told to look for him at police stations as far away as Kishanganj and Purnea.

As young Manjit tries to grapple with his trauma, Pinter's family members wait anxiously to see which version the police submit before the court. And whether he ever returns. •

Niranjan Dutta/Calcutta

The melting plot

It is time for Saans to fade out

When a story starts going sour, nothing seems to be able to retrieve it. Neena Gupta's *Saans*, one of Star's premier serials (Mondays, 8.30 pm) is suffering from a strong case of ennui, and viewers are falling asleep in heaps. When the plot focussed on Gautam, The Unfaithful Spouse, Priya, The Wronged Wife, and Manisha, The Other Woman, there was always some thing going on and even the sub-plots were interesting.

But now the serial seems to have gone into a stage of terminal decline. After weeks of dithering, when Priya agreed to let Gautam back in her life, we were relieved. When they decided to go back to their house with the kids, we were elated. But just as the suitcases were being packed, Manisha decided to throw a manic fit and lose her marbles along with her baby. So now Gautam is back to holding her



OUT OF FOCUS: Neena Gupta in *Saans*

hand, and we've been left clutching our heads.

It's all getting too dull. The first time Gautam erred and was forgiven, it set the serial going. The next time, it was a smart twist in the tale. When it happened a third time it was a bit much. Now you wonder whether Neena Gupta has got herself stuck in a groove and doesn't know how to extricate herself.

It might be better for *Saans* to pack up so that Neena can concentrate all her energies on her other serial, *Pal Chhin*, (Fridays, 8.30 pm) which began on Star a couple of months ago, but has never been as gripping as *Saans* in its initial stages.

Pal Chhin has more room making moves than women which bolsters the claim that she can only handle women-oriented subjects. But there's nothing to it. Not yet.

TRIPURA

Yours truly

A letter to Sonia Gandhi may prove costly for the state Congress

With a senior leader of the Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) raising doubts over the credentials of Sonia Gandhi as a prime ministerial candidate, the poll prospect of the state's main Opposition party for the forthcoming three-tier Panchayat elections has received a severe jolt.

In a letter to Sonia Gandhi on 7 June, TPCC general secretary Ratan Lal Nath observed: "People are increasingly becoming convinced that the demand voiced by Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar are legitimate and right for the protection of India's interest which is always threatened by forces operating from within and outside." Nath, who is also an All India Congress Committee (AICC) member, added: "We, therefore, suggest that you graciously accept the demand for amendment of the Constitution to ensure that the posts of President, vice-president and Prime Minister are occupied by only natural-born Indians and include the same in the Congress manifesto to be released before the ensuing general elections."

Nath has pointed out that the Congress was indulging in "senseless politics of expulsion" in the north-east where leaders like P.A. Sangma and B.B. Dutta, who are held in high esteem because of their political experience and unblemished record as dedicated Congressmen, were expelled without debating the issue they were associated with. "These expulsions have set in motion a chain of reactions which is going to have disastrous consequences in the party in the region," he said.

B.B. Dutta, for instance, had been the founder general secretary of the north-east Congress Coordination Committee since 1978. But he was issued a show-cause notice, giving him a seven-day deadline to resign. He was, however, expelled the very next day along with four other ministers who had been served the same notice. This was not the way a senior leader deserved to be treated, it was felt.

Towards the end of the letter, Nath said: "We have nothing against you personally. We are your well-wishers and admirers. But in a situation such as this, honesty demands that we tell you the truth. Do not behave the way a bunch of sycophants around you are behaving now, only to abandon you later."

The letter kicked off a controversy when Nath's detractors within the party got to lay their hands on a copy of the "confidential letter" and gave it to the press. The TPCC president took serious exception to the letter and wrote to the AICC saying that it was in the best interest of the party to expel Nath for at least six years. But, interestingly, no action has so far been taken against him despite TPCC's recommendations.

Nath, meanwhile, is confident that with his hold over grassroots and secondary-level Congress workers in Tripura, the party will never let him down. "I am a Congress activist and even if I am expelled from the party I will continue to remain within the party as I have no intention to join any other party," Nath told SUNDAY. •

Kuntala Chakraborty/Agartala



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 4 JULY, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

Little or no effort will be required on your part for things to work out just as you had hoped. You should now stand back and allow events to follow their natural course. Keep travel to a minimum. Phone calls and letters can be just as effective as personal visits. Romance may be disappointing.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

Extra time given to occupational affairs will give personal resources a boost. Try attending to maintenance jobs around the home. You will be skilled at do-it-yourself operations. Take a friend along if you are making costly purchases for you may be carried away by appearances and fail to see flaws.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

It will be tempting to waste valuable time in idle chatter and unnecessary conversations. You should ensure that your time and energy are put to more constructive use. There is probably plenty to be getting on with. You will feel more pleased for clearing jobs and chores than in wasting time.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

Chaos can reign supreme unless someone decides to influence the situation in the office for the better. It would be best if you take the initiative to do so. Outings with loved ones can be delightful. Feelings can be expressed in words as well as actions.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

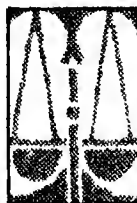
It is unwise to let curiosity get the better of you. You must respect the privacy of other people. You may court resentment if you interfere in other people's financial affairs. Keep your love of material things in perspective. Other people's property may be exert too strong a hold over you.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

You need to stand back and view current concerns, undertakings and relationships at arm's length. There is a great danger of not being able to see the woods for the trees if you continue to grapple at close quarters with your problems. Don't make matters worse by making heavy-handed gestures.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

Unexpected developments may leave the way wide open for you to make some extra cash. Business associates may be utilizing craft and cunning. It won't be easy to make a meaningful impression on influential people. They may ignore the suggestions or requests you are making.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

This is not the time for jumping in where angels fear to tread. Wait to see what moves other people make. Situations need to be judged very carefully before you play your cards. Crowded places may get you down nowadays. Arrange to take work home if you cannot concentrate at your work place.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

It is best to steer well clear of provocative statements or subjects that are likely to stir up resentment. People may protect themselves in violent and unpredictable ways if they feel that you are getting at them. It is a time when your sense of tact and diplomacy can help you avoid trouble.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

People to whom you look for help and support can be far from cooperative. It is unwise to place high expectations on influential people. Your business acumen and financial skills can come in for stiff criticism from bankers or financiers.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

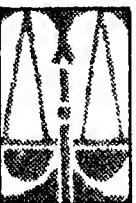
Any additional money that comes your way is best lodged in a savings account. You should do all you can to minimize unnecessary spending. Youngsters can be in a mischievous mood. They can be in trouble unless they are channeled into constructive activities.



SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

It won't be easy to get around people by using flattery or other emotional ploys. Be more straightforward from the start. Be wary of leading potential romantic partners on if you are not serious about them. Mates or spouses may pour cold water on your plans.



Focus: UP

■ In two years, Uttar Pradesh is going to be the focus of the World Bank's attention.

UP has promised to undertake a massive restructuring programme to enable it to get aid from the Bank for



several projects. Chief minister Kalyan Singh is making serious efforts to reduce fiscal deficit, increase revenue and decentralise financial decisions. After he's done all this, the World Bank wants to turn UP around.

The only problem is that UP's accounts are in a mess and the Bank finds that many figures don't add up. It is hoping that elections are held soon and a political structure is in place so that the money it wants to pump into the state can be recovered.

Blooming hopes

■ A new air-conditioned flower market near the New Delhi airport is raising hopes of the floriculturists.

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

Why V. Reddy?

A BUREAUCRAT IN THE PMO, ON HEARING THAT Y.V. REDDY, DEPUTY GOVERNOR OF THE RBI, MIGHT BECOME FINANCE SECRETARY

The market, to be set up with Israeli assistance, will display fruits and vegetables from all over India. This is cheerful news for a sector beset with problems. Last year, 31 floriculture units across the country closed down because of unviability. India is the only country which faces a 9.5 per cent duty in the European Union for fresh cut flowers.

Floriculturists are the only ones who want declassification from being called an industry. They want agriculture status so that they can avail of tax and export benefits.

Indian flowers are 24 per cent more expensive than others across the world, because of taxes, transportation problems and high interest rates.

Kalyan Singh: will the World Bank help?

CHECK-LIST

Indian banks: a downward spiral

■ **State Bank of India:** Net profits went down by 44 per cent in the country's largest commercial bank, because of the expenses on account of the Resurgent India Bonds, wage hikes and bad loans to industry, i.e. non-performing assets (NPA).

■ **Bank of India:** Reported a 44 per cent drop in profits mainly because of increase in wages and NPA. Also, the bank had sold overseas property last year which swelled its profits. So the figure had to come down this year.

■ **Bank of Baroda:** Along with financial institutions had lent money to industries in sectors like steel, textiles and chemicals. This had added to its NPA. Mutual fund businesses also added to losses. Still Bank of Baroda is better off than many others.

■ **Indian Overseas Bank:** Profits went down by 51 per cent because of wage bills and NPA in the form of loans to textile industries.

Tempting providence

■ What is it with ministers in the economic ministry? At least two of them had a close brush with death last week.

Finance minister Yashwant Sinha was returning from



Yashwant Sinha: great escape

Patna when his aircraft collided with another after coming in to land. He had a providential escape.

Two days later, petroleum minister Vazhappadi Ramamurthy was travelling to Madras and his aircraft developed a snag. The flight had to land in Nagpur amid technical difficulties and passengers had to stay there for several hours before another aircraft could be arranged. •



V. Ramamurthy: luck was on his side

Blame it on them

It was more than just another list. According to Kamal Nath, it was a hit-list.

Last fortnight, Nath and three other Congress leaders were deputed to visit Kargil as part of a Congress delegation. So Jitendra Prasada



Kamal Nath: returned safely

returned from Shahjahanpur where he had been holidaying, and boarded Nath's helicopter along with Ahmed Patel and Balram Jhakar. Dressed in jeans and sweaters, the team (according to a sycophant eager for a ticket from Jammu, looked 'just like teenagers').

However, when this group of overgrown teenagers returned to Delhi, they switched to their kurta-pyjamas and went to call on the Congress president. With the ordeal behind him, a cheerful Nath bounded into 10 Janpath and assured Sonia that they had returned, safe and sound. "I'm sure Salman Khurshid must have suggested Jitendra Prasada's name and Madhavrao Scindia must have put in my name," he said. Adding, "But you can tell them it didn't work."

Even Sonia Gandhi had to laugh at that one.

HEARD IN THE AICC

This is just the Lal before the storm.

A CONGRESSMAN ON BHAJAN LAL'S THREAT TO SABOTAGE A BANSI LAL GOVERNMENT IF THE CONGRESS ENTERED INTO AN ALLIANCE WITH BANSI

Azad quarrelling?

At a recent Congress press conference in Hyderabad, Shiv Shankar's son Sudhir organised Youth Congress workers to shout slogans hailing Shiv Shankar's role.

Ghulam Nabi Azad made some caustic remarks about Shiv Shankar. Shiv Shankar wasted no time at all in retaliating and said that the Congress was carrying the burden of all the people who came with big promises and did nothing about them.

Meanwhile, the slogan shouting had become so loud and insistent that the press conference was almost called off halfway.

Don't quarrel

Why are P. Shiv Shankar and Ghulam Nabi

CHECK-LIST

State Congress units: who's fighting whom

■ **Madhya Pradesh:** Digvijay Singh still has at least one faithful acolyte — Kamal Nath. But the fight is still between a badly damaged Arjun Singh and chief minister Digvijay Singh. We're happy to report that the Shukla brothers don't seem to be playing a role in Congress politics in Madhya Pradesh — which means there is one conflict less.

■ **Delhi:** Shiela Dikshit is trying to hold her own against the traditional Delhi Congress leaders — and some BJP ones as well, for M.L. Khurana and H.K.L. Bhagat seem to be working in close tandem.

■ **Uttar Pradesh:** Everyone is fighting everyone else. Salman Khurshid and Jitendra Prasada, once such good friends, are slugging it out. And the gainer could be N.D. Tiwari who could bring the upper caste votes to the Congress.

■ **Rajasthan:** Chief minister Ashok Gehlot and Girija Vyas are at each other's throat — so much so that Sonia Gandhi's visit to Rajasthan had to be called off because Vyas invited her to the state without consulting Gehlot who knew nothing about the trip.



P. Shiv Shankar: angry with Azad

No one can figure out why the two quarrelled. Maybe proximity to Sonia Gandhi is one reason.

Collision course

■ If central leaders quarrel, can state leaders be far behind? The Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) chief, Y.S. Rajsekhar Reddy (YSR) and the Congress Legislature Party chief N. Janardhan Reddy (NJR) have been on a collision course for a long time. Things have come to such a pass that the two have announced they're going to undertake separate election tours to campaign for the Congress.

The real break came when NJR was not allowed to speak at the Sonia Gandhi rally at Rajahmundry organised by YSR, allegedly owing to a 'communication gap'. So NJR announced his own election tour of Telangana to which MLAs owning allegiance to YSR were not invited. In retaliation, YSR has organised his own little three week election campaign trip — to which NJR's supporters are not called.

MLAs are confused because they don't know whose campaign to join. And with this state of affairs, the Congress expects to sweep Andhra Pradesh in the forthcoming elections! •

George's choice

■ George Fernandes may have grown up enough to give up campaigns to chase MNCs out of India, especially Coke and Pepsi. But he continues to be uncompromising about his personal habits.

He was invited to a television recording of an interview last week. The canteen in the studio had run out of milk, so the guests were serv-



George Fernandes: say no to Coke and Pepsi
ed black coffee.

When he was handed his plastic glass, he held it gingerly, peering into it. Then he shifted it suspiciously and asked: "What is this? Pepsi or Coke?" Only when told apologetically that it was neither, just black coffee, did Fernandes take his first sip.

There's praxis for you.

Marathi connection

■ The Congress high command is getting helpful suggestions from its Madhya Pradesh unit. One of them is that Madhavrao Scindia could be moved from Gwalior to Satara, Maharashtra, to take on Sharad Pawar. The argument is that Scindia is a Maratha, speaks Marathi fluently, and

HEARD IN THE NORTH BLOCK

Q: Why is Haryana India's most religious state?

A: Because they have a Bhajan, they have a Bansi and they have an Om. All they need now is an Aarti.

A BUREAUCRAT

has an unbeatable image.

The party knows exactly why these suggestions are being made. It has everything to do with the fact that Satara is considered a 'strong' seat for the Nationalist Congress Party. In the last Lok Sabha, it was held by a descendent of Shivaji's family, Abhay Singh Bhonsale, who is in Pawar's camp now. The high command knows that those who are 'offering' Scindia this seat have only one consideration: that the



Madhavrao Scindia: will he contest from Satara?

'Congress' should win this seat. But no one is taken in by this unexpected display of loyalty for Scindia and the party. The irony of the situation is that Prataprao Bhonsale, the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee leader, is also from Satara. The general opinion is that he can't win this seat.

There is a chance that Maharaj might shift from Gwalior. But it won't be to Satara.

CHECK LIST

Romesh Sharma case: an update

■ **The story so far:** Romesh Sharma was arrested and charged with a slew of crimes, ranging from fraud to extortion. He was also charged with being a front-man for Dawood Ibrahim.

■ **The new development:** Among the many cases, he was charged with having grabbed a farmhouse belonging to M.K. Subba, lottery king. Subba tried to get the farmhouse back by force and Sharma directed from jail, that security be stepped up. He also sent for his nephew, Surinder.

■ **The twist in the tale:** He sent his girlfriend Kunjam Budhiraja to perform puja during navratri. Kunjam was murdered in the farmhouse allegedly by some of the persons staying there to 'protect' the farmhouse.

■ **Sharma's role:** At Kunjam's funeral, Sharma cried copiously and laid red bangles on the pyre to indicate he had 'married' Kunjam. Meanwhile, his nephew was arrested and confessed that it was Sharma who had told him to have Kunjam murdered.

■ **What happens now:** The police has said in court that they believe Sharma is responsible for the murder. If this is proved, he could be in jail for some time.

Dress conscious

■ It began with his elegant, blow-dried hair. Smart elevator heels followed. Now Jairam Ramesh has undergone a total sartorial transformation.

Gone are the knee-length Fab India kurtas. It is the yuppie look which is in these days. Take a cue from Ramesh — pleated linen trousers with sharp creases and understated long and short sleeved shirts are in. Tuck them in to flatter a flat tummy, let it all hang out if you so desire. Wear checks or stripes, we're not laying down any laws. But make Ramesh your guide as your personal fashion statement — and you're sorted.



WHERE NEXT?



Seven wonders of the world

Five Great Lakes in the States

10 days - 10 nights in Stockholm

Two seas in England

One mother-of-a-trek in the Himalayas

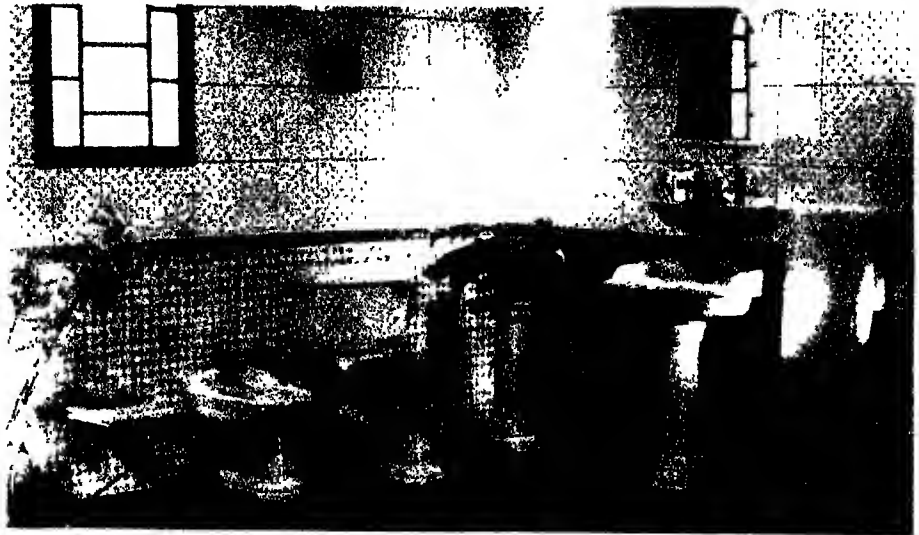
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NADEEM: AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

SUNDAY

*Understanding
the politics of
the captaincy
of the Indian
cricket team*



SACHIN TENDULKAR



AJAY DADA

**save
Indian
CRICKET?**

INDIA

**MORE ON
KARGIL**

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Understanding the politics of the captaincy of the Indian cricket team

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'Because I was a successful Muslim'

The reason why Nadeem feels he has been persecuted

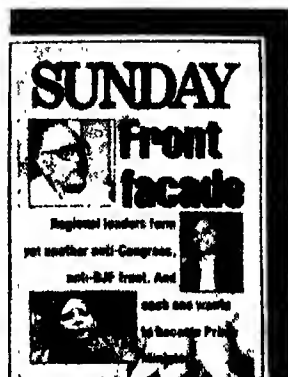


NEWSWATCH 32

On the warpath

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee attacks Pakistan and his political opponents at a rally in Patna





Scramble for power

The cover story *Front facade* (27 June—3 July) made a delightful reading. It has been rightly pointed out that if Pawar and Co manage to get more than 30 seats, they can bargain for the top job itself. Bût in a party where there are more prime ministerial candidates than party workers, one can easily understand the resultant chaos.

Evidently, Sharad Pawar wants to become PM and that is why he severed ties with the Congress on flimsy

grounds and formed a new party. Similarly, Sangma has his own plans too. Otherwise, why would he leave his old job as Speaker? Mulayam Singh Yadav also made no secret about his prime ministerial ambitions.

Indian electorate must use their guintion before electing these power-crazy leaders.

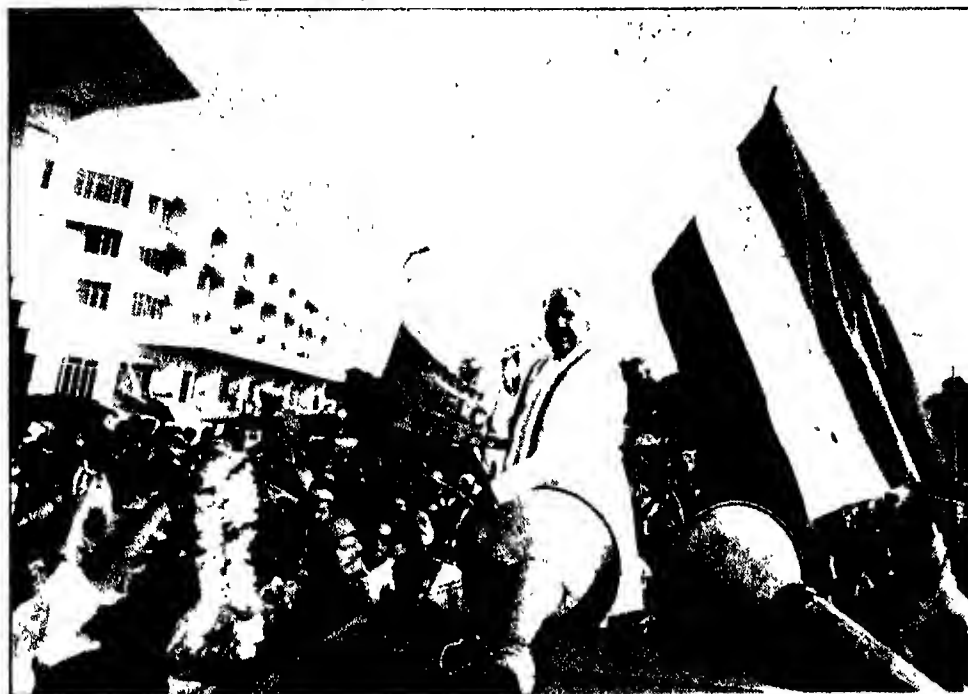
Kiran Khare, Indore (Madhya Pradesh)

■ Maratha strongman has both the Congress and the Sena-BJP alliance worried in Maharashtra. Pawar won the first round in the battle for supremacy when 45 of the 77 Congress legislators pledged their loyalty to the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

Pawar has built a solid base for himself during his exile from the Congress between 1978 and 1985. His political calculations are accurate. With Pawar finally finding his backbone, the NCP will pose a threat to the western Maharashtra, a traditionally Congress domain.

Rita Goel, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Sharad Pawar: aiming for the top



Suicidal obsession

In his article, *Pak perfidy* (20—26 June), the writer has rightly pointed out that as far as our warring neighbour is concerned, our country has failed to learn from its past mistakes. And, therefore, history keeps repeating itself too often. If Pakistan has been catching us off guard with its repeated incursions into our territory, it is our gullibility rather than ineptitude that is to be blamed. Every time Pakistan has been humbled by India, it pretends to dole out an olive branch which inevitably turns out to be poison ivy. Albeit impoverished, it simply can't get over its rather suicidal obsessions of annexing the embattled state of Kashmir. When all its previous attempts failed, it resorted to invoking insurgency in the state and perhaps feeling emboldened enough with the help of the Kashmiri Mujahideen, plotted and planned the Kargil incursion.

The bitter truth is that the

Pak incursion is an extension of the double games played between the civilian authority and the army with the latter invariably emerging victorious and making a farce of the elected government. Is it any surprise then that Pakistan tends to become war-happy at the cost of being diplomatically isolated in the world today?

Nalini Sudhakaran, Trivandrum (Kerala)

Indian by choice

When the columnist says that Fiji has recently elected an Indian Prime Minister, he fails to inform the readers that the forefathers of the present Fiji PM migrated to Fiji more than 100 years ago and the Prime Minister was born and brought up in that country (*PJO*, 30 May—5 June). For all purposes, Fiji was his motherland. This cannot be said of Sonia Gandhi, who till recent past (1983) was an Italian citizen. Khushwant Singh has recorded that at some point of time (after Sanjay's death) both Rajiv and Sonia had decided to leave India for good. This shows the amount of loyalty Sonia had towards India.

The columnist forgot to mention that world's oldest democracy does not permit anybody else except the naturalised citizens of USA from becoming the President of USA. And the columnist couldn't write anything better because he is ever grateful to Sonia for his present job in Congress headquarters in New Delhi.

S.S. Saksena, New Delhi

Thank you, SUNDAY

Hats off to SUNDAY for bringing out an item (under Spotlight section)

headlined *Music is the food of love* (20—26 June). Alisha Chinoy has really brought laurels to India by her sweet voice. She has been my idol not only as a singer but also as an individual. But, one thing really hurts me. Though Alisha Chinoy has got the credit for the international music awards for the album 'Made in India', it was painful to know that Filmfare could not give a single award. Isn't that amazing? Finally, you deserve special thanks for her photograph.

Milind D. More, Nashik (Maharashtra)

Change of guard

India has to find a successor who is more forceful than Azharuddin who has had a good run as a captain (Aza! 27 June—3 July). Change is the demand of the new millennium. The home of



Azharuddin: living on borrowed time

cricket has changed, the spectators have changed. Yet, we don't seem to change. We need someone very strong and confident at the helm. We need someone who can ensure closeness and push

the team when the need arises.

Samir Bagchi, Siliguri (West Bengal)

■ The government of India and several business organisations announced innumerable prizes in the event of India winning the World Cup. But the soldiers who are sacrificing their lives at the Kargil sector and who might be honoured with a Param Vir Chakra posthumously, hardly get anything for their heroic job.

Sure, encouragement is necessary but not for a game which is so well-established and which has been played in every lane by almost every Indian. More incentives are needed to motivate youngsters into games like badminton, hockey etc. Also, in a welfare state where the unemployed youth are not even granted an unemployment dole, it is criminal to waste so much money on cricketers who are earning enough through ads and endorsements.

Arun A. Kurkute, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Blinkered vision

This refers to the column headlined *The Moopanur of Maharashtra* (6—12



Calcutta skyline: City of Joy

June). The columnist found virtue in Jayalalitha as his Congress party wants to forge an electoral alliance with her and try to gloss over her corruption charges by calling M. Karunanidhi as the father of corruption.

That Jayalalitha has amassed huge wealth through tout means and wallows in luxury is well-known. Her lifestyle doesn't go along with her utterances for the poor and downtrodden. She could overshadow anybody with her pomp and show which come in handy to her because of her earlier reel life.

Karunanidhi, on the other hand, struggled throughout his life for the Dravidian movement.

V.S. Sankaran, Madurai (Tamil Nadu)

What's in a name?

This refers to the story *Talk of the town* (20—26 June). There is no need to change the name of Calcutta or any other city. Already the change of name has taken place for Bombay, Poona and Madras because of regional and political bias. Otherwise what was the need to change the popular names? We have already seen the fate of regional politics, the offshoot of which is the coalition government at the Centre. It's time we get rid of regional sentiment and think on broader perspective.

Mahesh Kumar, New Delhi

Teaching a lesson

The cover story *When will it end?* (20—26 June) carrying the interviews of wounded soldiers gave a boost to the morale of the Indian Army fighting in Kargil.

The military manoeuvre in Kargil has been codenamed Operation Vijay, indicating victory. That is good for the morale of the defence services as well as for the nation, in the drive to evict the intruders from Indian territory across the Line of Control. It is time India beat the enemy at his own game.

R. Ramasami, Thiruvannamalai (Tamil Nadu)

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

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Ravi Kalia
Business executive



Viswanathan Anand
Chess player

Contributed by Tapee Sen, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

ANNOUNCED: by Shankersinh Vaghela, ex-Gujarat CM, the merger of his Rashtriya Janata Party with the Congress. The formal merger will be on 17 July.

APPOINTED: Arun Singh, former minister of state for defence in the Rajiv Gandhi government, as special



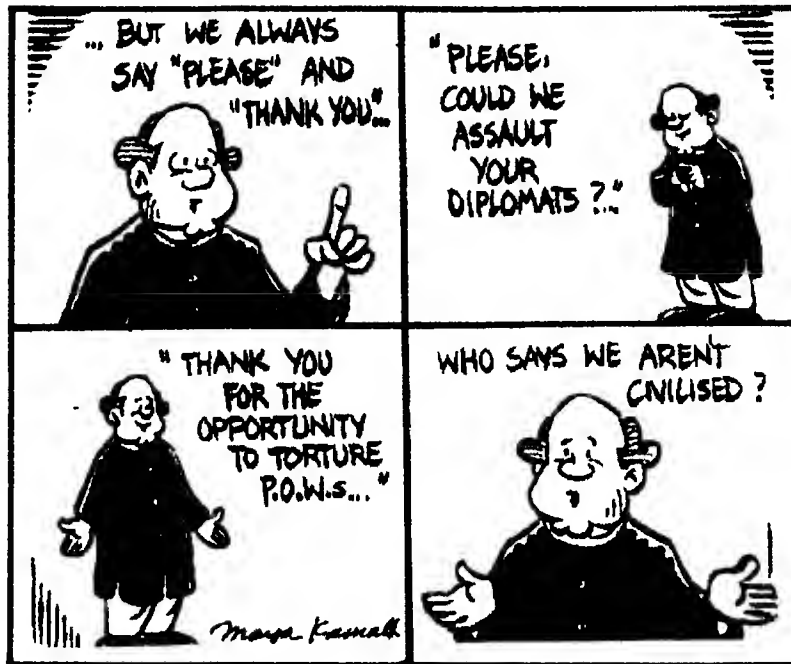
executive assistant to external affairs minister Jaswant Singh.

VOTED: Amitabh Bachchan, Bollywood superhero, the millennium's greatest-ever star on stage or screen in an international poll of users of the BBC's Internet News Online service. The Angry Young Man of the 70s scored over legends like Lawrence Olivier, Alec Guinness, Charlie Chaplin and Marilyn Monroe.

LIFTED: by the Union Cabinet the ban on dealings with Celsius Corporation of Sweden, corporate successor of AB Bofors, to facilitate speedy supply of ammunition and spares for the 155-mm Howitzers, the army's mainstay in the Kargil conflict.

APPOINTED: Gautam Singhania as MD of Raymond Ltd, the flagship of the Rs 2,000-crore Raymond Group.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH FOR A JAVAGE

■ We are seeing something very Indian, something very Gandhian, very Christian and I believe, something truly amazing

GARY ACKERMAN, US Democratic Congressman, praising Atal Behari Vajpayee's "Herculean restraint" in handling the Kargil crisis

■ India is a giant, sluggish elephant but the Pakistanis are lean and mean

ASHLEY TELLS, US military expert, on India's intelligence failure that allowed Pakistani intruders to isolate the LoC

■ Nuclear weapons are not meant to be kept on the shelf if security of the motherland is threatened

RAJA ZAFARUL HAQ, religious affairs minister of Pakistan



■ I will devote all my time and energy to realise our overriding objective to lead the Congress party to a resounding victory under the leadership of Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

ARJUN SINGH, CWC member, after he announced that he wouldn't contest the Lok Sabha elections

■ I've never aspired to captaincy and am ready to play in any capacity.

SACHIN TENDULKAR, ace batsman

■ People have suddenly rediscovered their Indianness. So if Nike says 'Do it', with Zip Sip I say 'Doodh it.' It's the in-thing to be *desi* now.

PRAHLAD KAKKAR, ad film-maker

■ I always wanted to be either a dancer or an actress. Now that I am an actress, I am working to be a good one.

SEEMA BISWAS, who played the role of Phoolan Devi in Bandit Queen

SEEN POWER OF INDIA

Krishna Gopal Srivastav — the self-proclaimed brute force reincarnate



JAWS: *Srivastav pulls the 275-tonne tug*

He stood alone on the pier, a five-foot-something frame in deep concentration. Looked as if the slightly bent head was in hotline with the million-strong divine pantheon which inhabits 360 degrees of solid cosmos. He wanted their blessings, yeah, loads of them. His red jocks were secured tight round his waist with a sturdy band. The *zari* and velvet letters on the band read: Tiger of India.

Between his teeth he held a milk-white piece of padded cloth which was wrapped around a half-inch-thick nylon rope. The two ends of the rope, run over his shoulders, were tied to a 275-tonne tug from Calcutta Port Trust. The mighty boat was bobbing merrily in the still water and the tiger was raring to go. The white T-shirt had the sponsor's emblem which encouraged you to have strong teeth.

The couple of hundred people who had gathered fell silent. They were waiting for the moment when from boiling depths raw energy would be suddenly unleashed and then steeled into superhuman kinesis. The stocky torso was now in rigid incline. The cuff muscles had gone taut. The shoes, wanting a firmer grip, dug into the ground. Veins stood on his forehead, they could explode any moment in a bloody spray, and his face was a deep-red flush.

Then his arms went up as a hoarse, guttural wail rose from deep inside and suddenly, the rope went taut. The legs pumped backwards. The tug didn't budge. Again he lunged forward. The 275-tonner got a nudge, its engi-

ne on an idle whine. He pulled again, straining against mass and inertia, this time a more concentrated effort. And then, it moved.

The ship was inching closer like an obedient consort. Shouts of *Jai bajrangbali* rent the air, the whirr of shutters played a staccato beat as flashbulbs threw silver light on the man pulling a ship with his teeth.

Meet Krishna Gopal Srivastav. Adhunik Bheem (1990), Adhunik Gama (1991), *Limca Book Of Records* for towing a Boeing 737 at Palam Airport (1992), *Limca Book* for towing a 110-tonne catamaran at Bombay (1996), Letter of appreciation from the *Guinness Book*. Meet Krishna Gopal Srivastav: full-time power house, part-time sweet-shop owner from Datia, Madhya Pradesh.

What's his inspiration? More than his faith in Bajrangbali and *suddh* vegetarian diet, it's his deep anguish when India loses a cricket match that makes him move mountains. It's his own way of avenging the defeat and proclaiming, 'East or West, India is the best.' He's the self-proclaimed brute force reincarnate. Our homegrown Hulk Hogan.

Yet his gods deserted him two days later. He failed to pull an Airbus 320. The tarmac wasn't good enough. The wheels were jammed and, as cynical critics sniggered, that crucial nudge wasn't there.

Srivastav remains unfazed. He is planning to pull again. •

Sourabh Sen/Calcutta

It's his deep anguish when India loses a cricket match that makes him move mountains. It's his own way of avenging the defeat

V.K. GROVER

The G-8 can play a positive role only if it puts Pakistan in the dock

THE GULL

The Group of Eight comprises Canada, France, Germany, UK, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United States and the European Commission. The idea of providing leaders of the world's richest nations (G-7) with the opportunity of meeting informally, in a relaxed environment, was conceived by German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and the French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1975. At that time the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates had disintegrated and the oil price shock had triggered a global recession.

The first summit was held at Rambouillet, France, in '75. D'Estaing had earlier been the French finance minister and the G-7 — could well have been termed the golden seven — was initiated purely as an economic grouping.

Originally the idea was to have only five countries — France, Germany, the UK, Japan and the US. However, at that time, the GNP of the UK was less than that of Italy, so Italy was brought in. The US felt the grouping was too heavily weighted in favour of the Europeans and Canada joined in 1976 and the EC in 1977.

The summits and the communique are prepared by high-ranking collaborators of the leaders, who are called "Sherpas". The G-8 does not have a secretariat. The presidency (currently with Germany) is for a period of one year. The Sherpas and the presidency take assistance, when required, for data and information, from the ECD, NATO and the OSCE. The summits are preceded by meetings of the finance and foreign ministers.

The summits of Rambouillet (1975), Puerto Rico ('76) and London ('77) mainly concentrated on restoring a balanced growth of the world economy. The summits of Venice ('80), Ottawa ('81), Versailles and Williamsburg ('82 and '83) were marked by reactions to the rising tensions between the East and the West. In London ('84) terrorism was the focus. In Venice ('87) the concentration



was on drugs, but the summits of Toronto ('88) and Paris ('89) again focused on the coordination of currency and macroeconomic policies. The summits of Houston ('90) and London ('91) explored ways to bring Russia into the new world order. Mikhail Gorbachev was invited to attend the final day of the London summit and Russia was involved from 1991 onwards.

Broadly speaking, the G-7 remained primarily an economic grouping till the end of the Cold War. Russia was formally admitted as a full member in 1997. Earlier it was allowed to attend political discussions but did not participate in the economic forums. It became difficult to ask Russia to leave the conference every time the discussion turned to economic subjects. Between 1991 and 1997 there was the format of the G-7 and the P8.

Kosovo marked the advent of the global political role the G-8 has now assigned to itself. The NATO action in Yugoslavia had no international sanction and the G-8 replaced the UN Security Council during the Kosovo crisis.

The G-7 or G-8 has been making statements on Kashmir for some time. They have not been particularly favourable for India. The 1998 Birmingham summit was severely critical of our nuclear tests and called upon India to sign the NPT and the CTBT. They went as far as to say that "India's relationship with each of us has been affected by these developments". Their statement was made in-between the Indian and the Pakistani nuclear tests.

The first balanced and constructive statement to come from the G-8 on Kashmir was at the Cologne summit in June

BLE EIGHT



1999. It called for the armed intruders in Kargil to be withdrawn, for the Line of Control to be fully respected and for the resumption of dialogue.

It would be far too naive to think there has been a great change of heart on the part of the US, which has been the main driving force behind this statement. Germany drafted the resolution and France and Russia supported it. The US as usual is being driven by self-interest. Both India and Pakistan are nuclear-weapon states. The US knows fully well that control over the nuclear trigger in Pakistan is with the army and not with the civilian administration, and Pakistan's misadventure could turn into a catastrophe.

Secondly, the US has always needed an arch-enemy or villain. First it was the evil Soviet empire, then Saddam Hussein, and lately Slobodan Milosevic.

The current favourite is Osama bin Laden. For once the US is not manufacturing an enemy.

Laden, and what he stands for, are a real threat not only to the West but to India as well. The Pakistan-Laden-Taliban nexus will remain the fountainhead for global Islamic fundamentalist terrorism well into the next century. We have paid little heed to Afghanistan and our policy towards the North-West needs a complete overhaul if we are to safeguard our national security.

Unfortunately India has become

The first constructive statement by the G-8 on Kashmir came at the Cologne summit in June. It called for the withdrawal of armed intruders, respecting the LoC and resumption of dialogue



Osama bin Laden: eye on Kashmir

much too sensitive on the question of internationalisation. The Kashmir issue has been internationalised since 1989 when Pakistan started its undeclared war. We should not confuse internationalisation with mediation or a UN role. Since both India and Pakistan now have nuclear weapons, the international community cannot remain silent if there is a possibility of a larger conflict.

Clearly, any third-party mediation or a UN role is totally unacceptable to us. We cannot be blamed for taking this position. Nehru took Kashmir to the UN in 1948 in good faith. Instead of asking Pakistan to vacate its aggression, the UN started challenging J&K's accession to India. Kashmir became a casualty of the Cold War. In any case the Shimla Agreement provides only for a bilateral resolution of disputes. If we do not abide by it, any future agreement with Pakistan will have no sanctity either.

If the G-8 thinks Pakistan is going to withdraw its intruders by heeding to its pious sermons, it is sadly mistaken.

The G-8 will have to be renamed the Gullible-8, if it continues to remain under this impression. However, the G-8 statement on Kargil is welcome, whatever be the motivation. The G-8 can only play a positive role if it puts Pakistan squarely in the dock by imposing punitive sanctions, bilateral and through international financial institutions. If it looks for face-saving formulas, there will be no early resolution of the conflict.

However, the G-8 role must end once Pakistan has withdrawn to its side of the LoC. Any attempt to ask India and Pakistan to resolve the larger J&K issue, will be counter-productive. Both countries have to return to the bilateral process and there is national consensus on this issue.

It is rather distressing that our main Opposition parties are more interested in blaming the BJP for its failure rather than condemning Pakistan for its aggression and duplicity. The international community has clearly pointed the finger at Pakistan for starting the hostilities.

The first priority should be to unite totally on Pakistan's deliberate act of raising tensions in the region. The present government's failure of intelligence can always be debated at length, once our territory has been vacated. •

The author retired as secretary, MFA, Government of India.

Coup d'etat

Nawaz Sharif and the military establishment: heading for a showdown



Both on the Kargil battlefield and the diplomatic front, things have been moving fast and furious. A bit too furious and fast, one might say, judging from the hot-paced diplomacy, formal as well as informal, in recent days. However, at the time of writing, there has been no breakthrough of either kind. Except, of

course, for the fact that the Indian Army and the Air Force have continued to push back the Pakistani invaders and marauders from the strategic heights they have occupied.

Even so, it would be both naive and wrong to believe that the brazen violation of the LoC can be undone within a few days or weeks. It is going to be a long haul. Expectations of the Nawaz Sharif government being wise enough to cut the losses and withdraw the Pakistani troops and mercenary jehadists have almost certainly been dashed. The US has doubtless "leaned heavily" on the Pakistanis to undo the mischief they have committed. Only then can there be a revival of the Lahore process aimed at settling peacefully all issues, including Kashmir. But this has not worked.

Nor, interestingly, has Nawaz Sharif's personal disappointment with China which, contrary to his expectations, has maintained a stance of "neutrality" between India and Pakistan, and reaffirmed its call to both countries to resolve the Kashmir question through peaceful bilateral negotiations. Beijing's warning that continuing or escalating conflict would result in unwelcome "Western intervention" could not have been clearer. This has to be viewed, however, together with the four agreements signed during Nawaz's abruptly truncated sojourn in China. These, especially the one for the joint production of the S-7 warplane, are vital for strengthening Pakistan's capacity to defend itself. It is usually forgotten that, quite apart from the Chinese help to Pakistan's nuclear and missile programmes, 80 per cent of Pakistan's conventional weaponry is of Chinese origin.

Under these circumstances, one must reject the widely-held view that the sudden shortening of Nawaz's six-day, meticulously-planned China visit was caused by his dismay with the response to Kargil and Kashmir by his hosts. No Pakistani leader can possibly behave petulantly towards his or her country's staunchest, most durable and equally reliable ally. At the same time, Islamabad must know that, like any other great power, China is bound to have several different layers to its policy. Some of these are sometimes bound to be contradictory.

In any case, as Harvey Stockwell has reported in *The Times of India*, the Pakistani Prime Minister was looking distraught even before his talks with top Chinese leaders began. Possibly he had got some news during the flight that led to his distraction. In other words, his decision to cut short his sojourn and rush home had to do with some unpleasant domestic development. What could that be?

For quite some time, in apparently authoritative circles, in this country as in Pakistan, there has been talk of a possible military coup in Islamabad. On a recent visit to Delhi, during which he met George Fernandes, among others, the highly-respected Pakistani elder statesman, Mubashir Hussain, made no bones about his fears that Nawaz could be thrown out by the army. Some of the antics and statements of the Pakistani Army Chief, General Musharraf, do lend credence to the coup theory. His bland declaration that a meeting between Bill Clinton and Nawaz Sharif was being arranged, since contradicted flat by the foreign office in Islamabad, is a case in point.

However, when all is said and done, the fact remains that



Nawaz Sharif could be thrown out and replaced by some other politician more acceptable to the army, the feudal oligarchy and Islamists who seem to be ruling the roost

yet another military coup in Pakistan is unlikely despite that country's addiction to martial law and military dictatorship. Gone are the days when military dictators like Ayub Khan and Pinochet were held up as America's most valued and useful allies. In America's current gameplan to maintain its dominance of the world order, democracy and human rights have become powerful instruments. Any Pakistani general inclined to take over is thus bound to be in deep trouble.

What is possible, however, is that Nawaz could be thrown out and replaced by some other politician more acceptable to the army, the feudal oligarchy and Islamists who seem to be ruling the roost. It should not be overlooked that though Nawaz has made himself the most powerful Prime Minister of Pakistan since Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, by doing so he has also caused deep and widespread resentment which could prove politically fatal. •



Mani Kumar Subba: worked the system to make his riches

Dark secrets

For cash-strapped state governments, lottery was a legitimate instrument to mobilise resources by exploiting the human frailty to earn a fast buck without working up a sweat. What probably lent a moral edge to this state-sponsored gambling was the promise that the funds collected from such an enterprise would go in to creating social goods.

A recent Comptroller and Auditor General report on the Nagaland State Lottery reveals that government-run lotteries have little to do with either government or altruism. It is, if anything, a colossal financial heist — pulled off by the nexus of amoral politicians, corrupt bureaucrats and lottery agents — the monies of which are used by this mafia to suborn democratically elected governments by bankrolling secessionist move-

*How M.K. Subba
pillaged state lottery
funds and used them for
financing politicians
and even insurgents*

ments and empowering the enemy within.

CAG audited the account of Nagaland lotteries, under instructions of the home ministry, between 1993 and 1997 and found to its horror that Rs 5,000 crore had been ripped off from the state exchequer by the criminal nexus. The audit report alleges that every "conceivable transgression" took place in the running of the lottery. The CAG also found

that the lottery was only "state authorised" and not "state organised" as ordered by the Supreme Court.

Mandated by the home ministry to look into the plethora of allegations against the state lottery, CAG's findings of the loot, in its own reckoning, is gross underestimation. Besides, their focus has been restricted to just one state and that too for a brief period. In other states too, the situation was little different till the Bharatiya Janata Party government put an end to it.

What has lent a sinister twist to this lottery scam is that an individual of doubtful nationality and credentials (see box), Mani Kumar Subba, allegedly presides over the bulk of this trade. Known as the "lottery king", Subba was a Congress member of the dissolved Lok Sabha from Assam. Subba was in the news recently, when he ran foul of his partner

RISKY BUSINESS

Profiling the lottery king

For almost ten years now, Subba has been displaying his ingenuity by working the system to make his riches. There is clear recognition all around that not all his dealings with the government have been clean or straight. Besides peddling influence, he has been accused of milking state government lotteries and amassing considerable fortunes. But more importantly, he has been accused by detractors of being a foreign national who has sneaked into India after allegedly murdering his cousin, Kalimayi.

Subba has denied these allegations, but they seem to hang like an albatross round his neck. For many years, Subba enjoyed immunity from the north-eastern state governments and no attempt was made to verify his credentials. He had in the late Hiteswar Saikia and Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir powerful patrons to look after his interest.

His fortunes took a nosedive when the Congress was voted out of power in 1996. The wheels of law, albeit slowly, began to move. In 1997, the home ministry, responding to several petitions against Subba, decided to dig into his past.

This diminutive Gorkha, some of these petitions allege, was born in eastern Nepal. Christened Manir Limboo, he acquired a reputation of being a compulsive gambler. Marriage did not correct his erratic behaviour. In 1962, he is believed to have entered Sikkim but was chased out after being a nuisance. Later, Limboo entered Tinsukhia in Assam and dabbled with a primitive kind of lottery called *panch cheery*. Over an altercation, claims a petition, he landed in Dibrugarh Jail.

After his release, he went back to Nepal and quarrelled with his relatives over ancestral property. It was in 1971, that he allegedly killed Kalimayi. He was arrested and awarded life imprisonment by the Dibrugarh district court. Limboo was transferred to Belan Jail in central Nepal in



In Arunachal Pradesh, Subba managed to establish himself as a contractor. His marriage to a close relative of then chief minister Gegong Apang helped him in networking with the rich and the powerful

1973, feigning illness, he escaped from prison.

The petition alleges that after escaping from Nepal, Limboo came to Tinsukhia and changed his name to Manir Kumar Subba. His detractors have little substantive evidence (except some photographs) to prove that it was Limboo who emerged in his new avatar of Subba. The lottery king, too, derives strength from the prosecution's inability to establish that yesterday's Limboo is today's Subba. The CBI enquiry is being limited to verify the truth behind Subba being a foreign national.

In Arunachal Pradesh, Subba managed to establish himself as a contractor. Here he formed a close relation of the then chief minister Gegong Apang. The marriage bond was an important link between the two. Subba was a contractor in a number of

years, he became one of the biggest contractors of the state. He is believed to have made more than Rs 40 crore from these contracts.

His next step was to gain legitimacy through politics. Under the active patronage of Hiteswar Saikia, he managed to become the treasurer of Assam Congress. Through his burgeoning political contacts, Subba began to grab state lottery contracts. He fine-tuned his moneymaking enterprise with the help of bureaucrats who had been looking for companies and individuals to siphon off government funds. Subba also enjoyed considerable backing of the big industrial houses that conducted their business in these parts.

In 1991, he managed to win the Nagaon constituency seat. One Shyam Bahadur Chettri filed a petition claiming him to be the first foreign



Subba's father helped Subba gain legitimacy

national to win an election. Chetri could not appear in court as he disappeared under mysterious circumstances. One Nand Haque filed another petition against Subba but he too went up in smoke.

In the 1994 Lok Sabha elections, he covered the Lok Sabha and began to make his presence felt in national politics. Political sources claim that he is close to the Congress and the government. Congress members have accused him of being the mastermind behind the 1994 Lok Sabha elections. It was Subba who was said to have won the election for the Congress in the constituency of Noida. He was also said to have won the election for the Congress in the constituency of Noida.

The 1994 Lok Sabha election is believed to have been won by the Congress party. The Congress party is believed to have won the election in the constituency of Noida. The Congress party is believed to have won the election in the constituency of Noida. The Congress party is believed to have won the election in the constituency of Noida.

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ke that has proved to be the nemesis of many of his ilk and vocation. It was this moment of weakness that led the tax hounds to go after him. In an interview to a language magazine, *Ramachandran*, Subba boasted about

and Dawood's pointsman in Delhi, Romesh Sharma.

In an interview, that he later denied, he claimed to be the richest man in the country with his total fortunes amounting to an unbelievable Rs 20,000 crore (CAG's findings show that there could be considerable substance in his claim). Subba is believed to have liberally funded the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation and is considered to be close to the present dispensation in the Congress. He was one of the main organisers of Sonia Gandhi's recent meeting in Gangtok. BJP sources claim that Subba used his financial clout at the time when the Congress was trying to pull down the Vajpayee government.

The CAG's findings became the basis of a countrywide income tax investigation. On 23 June, officers of the directorate of investigation of IT raided 50 locations in different parts of the country. Sackfuls of documents were seized that allegedly point at Subba's close connivance with bureaucrats and industrialists. The Central Bureau of Investigation, too, is looking into his antecedents and trying to ascertain the modus operandi and motives of this lottery king. Understandably, Subba has denied these allegations and dismissed it as a BJP



his huge fortune claiming that he was poorer than the Tatas, Birlas and other industrialists and he had wealth to the tune of Rs 20,000 crore. He later denied the interview but the damage was done.

Lotteries on display: Subba's ticket to the moon?
conspiracy

But a report prepared by the Cabinet secretariat about the scam called state-run lotteries and the conduct of Subba is quite illuminating.

According to the report, the home ministry first came to know of the serious irregularities in the conduct of Nagaland lotteries in 1997. The ministry took three immediate steps:

- a) banned instant and single-digit lotteries,
- b) asked the CBI to investigate into the whole affair and
- c) asked the CAG for a special audit of the Nagaland lottery.

The CAG chose to confine its scrutiny to the period between October 1993 and November 1997 because Nagaland signed an agreement with M.S. Associates (allegedly owned by Subba) in September 1993. In April 1994, the Supreme Court in an attempt to curb malpractice in the lottery business laid down certain criteria for a lottery to be recognised as a state-run lottery.

M.S. Associates, with its head office in Delhi, was appointed as the state sole distributor (SSD). The SC order made it compulsory for state governments to control and regulate all activities relating to the conduct of lottery like printing of tickets, receiving the sale proceeds from the agent, payment of prize money, etc. The SSD was only expected to carry out the distribution and sale of tickets and to conduct draws.

The Nagaland government, the CAG discovered to its horror, totally violated every criterion laid down by the SC and allowed the SSD to run the lottery without any checks and controls. That in other words meant giving a carte blanche to the SSD to do whatever it wanted to with the monies. A close look at the financial implications of the lottery business in the last three years in Nagaland alone would show up the multi-crore securities scam as a child's play.

Here are the mind-boggling figures. It is estimated that during the period under scrutiny (1552 days), a total of 83,254 lottery draws under different schemes were held. This meant on an average 55 draws per day. Almost all the draws were held in Delhi. The total value of the tickets lifted by the SSD amounted to a whopping Rs 38,297.323 crore.

The SSD, according to the agreement, was required to pay Rs 5,000 per draw in case of bumper draws and Rs 4,000 per draw in other cases. Also 91 per cent of the face value was to be paid as non-taxable prize money. The SSD was to deposit the sale proceeds after deducting the costs. This was not done. An amount of Rs 3,406 crore was not



In 1998, Subba entered the Lok Sabha and began to make his presence felt in national politics. Sources claim that he is close to the coterie that surrounds Sonia Gandhi

deposited in the treasury. The auditors could not estimate the exact shortfall, as the state government was extremely unhelpful.

Test checks revealed that tickets for 469 lottery draws, the turnover of which **Kalyan Singh: Subba extracted concessions from him**



was Rs 254.05 crore, were printed and released by the SSD. The directorate of state lotteries (DSL) stated that "certificates" were given by the SSD that tickets had not been sold. Auditors did not believe the statement and refused to rely on the "certificates" when the DSL did not verify whether so-called "unsold tickets" were returned. The SSD, or in other words, Subba's company, allegedly earned Rs 254 crore.

The state government claimed that 91 per cent of the face value of the tickets are declared as prize money. Audit calculations showed that the SSD had shortchanged the government. It had only paid 78.25 per cent of the face value and pocketed the rest — Rs 5,000 crore.

The auditors also would not believe that the SSD had paid all the non-taxable prizes that it was expected to do. The total amount involved is Rs 15,194 crore.

Regarding the taxable prize amount, audit of 42,459 draws revealed that the SSD should have paid to the state Rs 59.45 crore. The state had only Rs 4.70 crore to show up. The audit for the rest of the 40,000 lottery draws was not even conducted to estimate the exact loot of prize money.

The SSD, according to CAG report, also made its crores from:

✶ Its failure to pay full royalty over the sale of Rs 38,297 crore worth of tickets (it pocketed Rs 5.45 crore from here).

✶ Chief minister S.C. Jamir's decision



S.C. Jamir: his decision benefited Subba

to reduce the guaranteed returns from Rs 6,000 to Rs 5,000 (this arbitrary decision led to a loss of Rs 9.74 crore in two years)

■ Being allowed by the DSL to save tax on account of deductions towards office expenses (the total loss to the government was Rs 52.16 crore).

■ By the simplest of devices: just choosing to print excess number of tickets over the approved limit implying that no prizes were given on these tickets even though they were sold (in one case the sole distributor sold ten lakh extra tickets, making Rs 110 crore in two days).

■ And by giving away most of the prizes to lottery agents and stockists.

What is particularly distressing is that the common people were swindled in the guise of a government-run lottery.

The government has not looked into Subba's shenanigans in other states. Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Sikkim have all been witnesses to Subba's formidable moneymaking repertoire. In Shillong, Subba had threatened to sue a local daily if it tried to link him with M.S. Associates. This local daily provided evidence linking the company with Subba's wife, Jyoti Limboo.

Sikkim chief minister Pawan Chamling became so disgusted with Subba that

he asked the home ministry to look into his conduct. Nagaland Governor O.P. Sharma, too, pleaded that Subba and his financial empire should be investigated thoroughly.

Subba has not confined his operations to the north-east. In Uttar Pradesh, he extracted bribe from the Kalyan Singh government. There he was charged with evading trade tax to the tune of Rs 3,500 crore. Some of the companies associated with him have dealership in states like Goa, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Everywhere his enterprise draws sustenance from vested interest.

By no reckoning can Subba alone be blamed for the loot that has epitomised

In an interview that he later denied, Subba claimed to be the richest man in the country with his fortunes totalling Rs 20,000 crore. CAG's findings show that there could be considerable substance in his claim

sed these poverty and insurgency-racked north-eastern states. A close look at Subba's rise in fortunes would show that he was merely a front for the heist perpetrated in these border states for years.

The script was prepared by the corrupt ruling nexus in Delhi and carried out by their minions in these states. This powerful coterie that has thrived by emptying state coffers provided immunity and protection to all those who participated in this criminal enterprise. Politicians, bureaucrats, industrialists, all made merry at the expense of the poor people.

Funds from these exertions were used for financing political parties and insurgencies from time to time. Turmoil in these states is a convenient smokescreen to ensure that the malfeasance of the ruling mafia is never brought to account. Whether it is Nagaland, Manipur or Mizoram or Punjab or Jammu and Kashmir, insurgency and secessionism has provided an excuse for such elements to pillage the exchequer.

There have been instances in the recent past where chief ministers have gone out of their way to give legitimacy to this enemy within. It was in Nagaland in 1991-92 that the chief minister of the day refused permission to prosecute a senior IAS officer whose corruption was legion. The CBI had found evidence of huge properties in Delhi and other places of the officer.

It was this officer, sources claim, who provided the knowhow to Subba and his political mentors to make monies from state lotteries. Even though he retired, no action was taken against him. There have been many since then both in the Centre and the state governments that have ensured that no harm came to this nexus.

Allegations abound that a senior bureaucrat from the Assam cadre in the home ministry was sympathetic to Subba and protected him till he was there. For some reason the government officials failed to believe that the lottery scam was little more than a criminal act to make money on the sly. If the Cabinet secretariat note is anything to go by, there is a welcome change in the mindset.

The Cabinet secretariat note recognises the serious nature of this threat to national integrity. "The possibility of a part of these funds flowing to the insurgent groups in the north-east and particularly in Nagaland cannot be ruled out," it remarked. ■

Sanjay Kapoor/New Delhi

Two possible scenarios emerge out of the Kargil conflict

WILL THE

In the beginning there was cautious optimism and slow wonder. Could the war really be ending?

All the signals said no. The day Nawaz Sharif was to return to Pakistan after stopping at London en route, fighting was at its fiercest so far, in the Mashkoh Valley, the region where Indian troops may have succeeded in encircling the Pakistanis. Yelling on the telephone to Lahore, anxious Indians asked their Pakistani friends what was going on. The response was cool: "We don't know, it is too early."

As SUNDAY went to bed, it was clear that several things stood in the way of peace returning to the subcontinent. Most notably the Islamic fundamentalists who will be baying for Nawaz Sharif's blood and the army which will not take kindly to a retreat. Nawaz Sharif's bet is that both the USA and China, two of Pakistan's strongest allies, are in favour of withdrawal. This fact would not be lost on the army. The problem is how to colour the withdrawal as an honourable victory for Pakistan.

Nawaz Sharif will tell Pakistan that Kashmir has been internationalised as never before, and the USA is very much a part of underwriting the Kashmir peace process. This is the victory.

Below are two scenarios which spell out the compulsions of India and Pakistan. Also, a possible sequenced end to the war and the glitches that could crop up

SCENARIO-I

This is the best case scenario for India. It is imperative for Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to deliver his side of the bargain sealed with the United States. The most important elements of this are: Pakistan will respect the Line of Control (LoC) with India and will pull back its forces to previous positions; all LoC issues will be resolved according to the Simla Agreement of 1972; and Indo-Pak bilateral matters will be discussed with reference to the Lahore Declaration.

Why is it so important for Nawaz Sha-

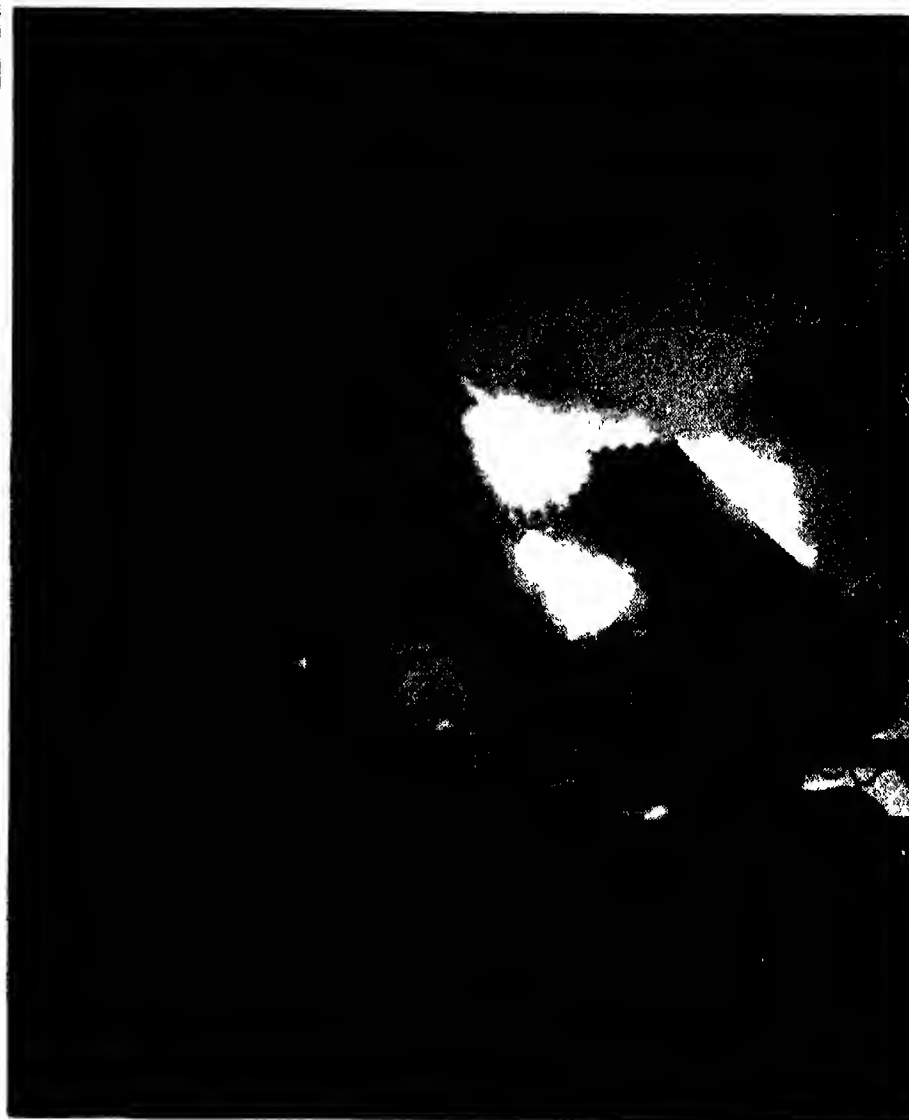
rif to sell this to Pakistan? Because his own position in the Pakistani state is under a threat if there is too much opposition to the pullout. His clout in the politico-military establishment in Pakistan will increase if there is a withdrawal. It will signal that the role of the military has been curtailed and the army discredited.

So once a withdrawal takes place, Nawaz Sharif will have to forge ahead quickly with other political and military changes. There could be a reshuffle of the military high command. Judging by

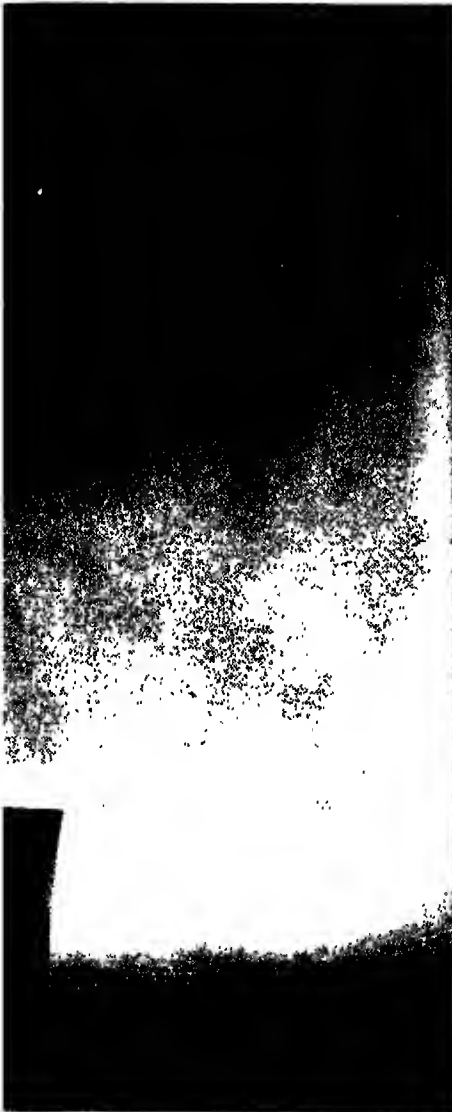
the Chinagate tapes, there is no love lost between the chief of the Inter-Services Intelligence, Ziauddin, on the one hand and the army chief Parvez Musharraf and the Chief of General Staff, Gen. Mohammad Aziz, on the other.

In fact, there was a strong rumour in Pakistan a few months ago that Nawaz Sharif was considering making Musharraf the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, and replacing him with Ziauddin as the Chief of Staff, once again separating the two offices.

This plan could not be put in opera-



WAR END?



India would not like to see Nawaz Sharif deposed. In fact, India did low-key diplomatic manoeuvring at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the height of the war because it wanted a weakened but not a tottering Pakistan. India would prefer to deal with a known quantity rather than an unknown one

tion because in 1997, Nawaz Sharif himself had decided that both posts should be held by the same person.

India would not like to see Nawaz Sharif deposed. In fact, India did low-key diplomatic manoeuvring at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the height of the war because it wanted a weakened but not a tottering Pakistan. It would prefer to deal with a known quantity rather than an unknown one.

The United States is most anxious to ensure Nawaz Sharif stays safe. It has already told India not to crow about its

victory for doing so may strengthen Sharif's adversaries.

SCENARIO-II

This is the worst case scenario for India. Nawaz Sharif can't tell his country that he hasn't capitulated to the United States. He is assassinated or deposed or put under house arrest. The army takes over.

This is not an unimaginable scenario. In the past, Pakistan has always gone to war when there has been military rule

and martial law administration has always yielded to civilian rule.

This time, though it is only a warlike situation, Nawaz Sharif knows that if he can't handle it, it is his life on the line.

This is why Sharif's trip to the United States was undertaken after discussions with the army chief who saw him off at the airport. According to information in New Delhi, three factors led to Nawaz Sharif's airdash to the US: One, Tiger Hill fell. Two, China's stated inability to side with Pakistan, judging by the statement it issued that both sides must res-

The Conquest of Tiger Hill

Reflects Indian Army's grit and resolve

After the Indian Army's victory over Pakistan in the Kargil conflict, the Indian Army's reputation for its ability to win in the most difficult terrain has been established. The Indian Army's victory over Pakistan in the Kargil conflict is a testament to its ability to win in the most difficult terrain. The Indian Army's victory over Pakistan in the Kargil conflict is a testament to its ability to win in the most difficult terrain.

Tiger Hill is in Dera valley what is to Pokhra in the valley. It is a small hill, but it is a very important hill. It is a small hill, but it is a very important hill. It is a small hill, but it is a very important hill.

The Indian Army's victory over Pakistan in the Kargil conflict is a testament to its ability to win in the most difficult terrain. The Indian Army's victory over Pakistan in the Kargil conflict is a testament to its ability to win in the most difficult terrain.



Lieutenant Singh: deft diplomacy
military skill and cunning. From Tiger Hill, Pakistan artillery could pick out targets on the road and adlib correct the fire. Together with Tololing and Point 5140, Tiger Hill is the pivot and opening for Maashkoh and Dras. But it could only be taken

after the heights on its east were first captured for lodgement of assault troops.

It was vital to engage Tiger Hill from as many directions as feasible, regardless of the degree of difficulty. Before the assault, Tiger Hill was kept pulverised day and night by air, artillery, and direct firing weapons, demoralising and degrading Pakistan defenders. Two battalions — 18 Grenadiers and 8 Sikh — together with paracommandos pressed the attacks on the night of 3/4 July. The enemy was outfoxed by the cunning of the assaulting troops. As they closed in to the top, the crack and thunder of Bofors slowed down. Both the Bofors and the multi-barrel rocket launcher blasted the face of Tiger Hill. Nearly 30,000 rounds were fired on and around Tiger Hill. The IAF used laser-guided bombs in precision attacks.

The honour of scaling and silencing Tiger Hill went to the Grenadiers. These 'Grinders' captured the post after hand-to-hand

HOW THINGS WILL SHAPE UP

- Pakistan informs India of its decision to withdraw.
- The two sides meet: possibly at the foreign ministers' level; maybe talks at the level of the Director-Generals (Military Operations) (DGMO).
- The process of de-escalation begins with withdrawal and simultaneous ceasefire on both sides in Kargil.
- DGMOs hammer out a time frame for withdrawal — this would have to be sectorwise withdrawal. Each side will give the other seven to ten days for verification.

- Local commanders carry out a joint inspection after withdrawal
- Each post is certified cleared. Mines and booby traps are indicated and defused.

Prime Minister Vajpayee: stand vindicated



- All four pockets of intrusions are cleared and certified. Both sides certify this.
- Pullback of forward deployment on the Pakistani side begins.
- Ceasefire along the entire Line of Control as part of the Pak-US joint communique that Pakistan will respect the Line of Control.
- Similar withdrawal takes place for the Indian Air Force.
- The Lahore process is resumed. The whole process could take anything between 30 and 45 days. •



Indian soldiers after capturing Tiger Hill: fight to finish

combat. Surprisingly, the toll for Tiger Hill was small — five killed and ten wounded.

At 6.00 in the morning, Lt. Gen. Krishan Pal, GoC 15 Corp, called army chief Gen. V.P. Malik and gave him the good news. Malik congratulated Maj. Gen. Mohinder Puri, GoC 8 Mountain Division, the formation with the motto 'Forever in Operations', and one Malik himself commanded earlier. Puri told Malik that fighting was still going on along a ridge in the north-west near Point 4875. Puri had, by then, put on Tiger Hill, previously held by 50 Pakistanis, more than 150 Grinders on top. Tiger Hill was covered with Pakistani dead bodies.

Meanwhile, mopping-up operations continued beyond Tiger Hill and Point 4875 was reduced by artillery and captured without loss by 1st and 1st K. Rif. battalions. So accurate was the artillery fire that Point 4875 has been renamed Gun Hill.

The conquest of Tiger Hill complex was an instant unit citation of gallantry for 19 Grenadiers. Its capture last week along with the capture of Tololing heights last month has given the army two bunches of formidable heights to dominate surrounding intruders. The

domination by observation and fire on the Leh road has been significantly reduced, leaving a few pockets in Kaksar.

These key lodgements on recaptured heights in Dras are both a wedge and fulcrum for operations towards Mashkoh in the west and Kaksar in the east. But the biggest prize is for artillery. Their observation posts (OPs) can now see across the LoC and do to Gultari what Pakistan was doing to Dras.

By capturing Tiger Hill and Point 4875 and extending the long arm to the LoC, the intruders in Mashkoh may get trapped. One exit route across the LoC is blocked by Indian posts at Marpora. The other is glaciated. What is possibly left is north-west of Point 4875.

The battles of Tiger Hill and Tololing will go down as epic engagements in the history of high altitude mountain warfare, replete with daring assaults, cunning and close combat of extraordinary order. In Batalik too, battles are being fought with equal ferocity and finesse.

These are the first-ever integrated air-artillery-infantry battles in the subcontinent. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

pect the LoC. Two, a letter leaked by the Americans, letting the Pakistani establishment know that Pakistan was party to conditionalities imposed by the World Bank that its defence spending must be curtailed. Pakistan's spending on defence was 11 per cent more than the levels permitted by the World Bank.

Nawaz Sharif saw that if he didn't have the support of China, and if the army started siding with Muslim fundamentalists, he would have no one but the United States to save his bacon. He tapped the US wisely, knowing the US had no bigger fear than of Muslim fundamentalists taking over a nuclear Pakistan.

If he can't sell the US-backed settlement in Pakistan, there is a good chance of an army coup in the country. On the other hand, the United States has given assurances on the Pressler Amendment, economic aid and other loans, if he can sell it.

Therefore, if he has to survive, Sharif will make sure he makes Pakistan accept the package. If he doesn't, the subcontinent is not a safe place.

Jaswant Singh is hoping that India can win the rest of the war without fighting it. He has to ensure he can help Nawaz Sharif to order an orderly withdrawal. And that the soldiers and the Taliban don't take to the streets

But there are many glitches in Nawaz Sharif's plan to order the withdrawal of his army. Latest reports indicate the soldiers and the Taliban in Kargil are terribly demoralised after the hammering on Tiger Hill. As many as 70 dead bodies were found on the scene of fighting. The word has spread that withdrawal is imminent. This could result in desertion and rout whose ramifications on the army can be unpredictably catastrophic.

Minister for external affairs, Jaswant Singh is hoping they can win the rest of the war without fighting it. He has also to ensure he can help Nawaz Sharif to order an orderly withdrawal. And that the soldiers and the Taliban don't take to the streets. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi



Angry demonstrators in Lahore: hardline measures

*Here's what
Nawaz Sharif will
have to handle*

Know Your Islamic Fundam

The advent of the Islamic fundamentalist in Pakistan society and deterioration of the internal stability environment can be traced back to the process of Islamisation started by President Zia ul Haq during the late 70s. Although the roots of Islamisation of the army go back to its rebirth as the Pakistan Army after Partition, the real impetus to it was provided by Zia ul Haq and the talibanisation of Afghanistan.

The most damaging legacy of his military regime was the mushrooming of new Deeni *madrassas* (Islamic seminaries) which was sponsored by the politico-religious parties of the purist

Deobandis and Wahabi sects. The Deoband school was influenced by the early 19th century Indian, Wahabiyah.

The studies in these schools are highly traditional and concentrate on a) jurisprudence (fiqh), b) Quranic exegesis (tafsir), c) the study of tradition (Hadith), d) scholastic theology (kalam), e) philosophy (falsafah). The students are drawn from the economically underprivileged class. The *madrassas* have become breeding grounds for sectarian intolerance rather than spiritual development. From a small number of 137 in 1947, they've grown to 5263 last year.

The decade of the eighties saw a gene-

ral militarisation of religious organisations, spreading the culture of jihad. The environment was complicated with Iran and Saudi Arabia supporting the Shia and Sunni militant groups in Pakistan. There are more than a dozen fundamentalist groups operating in Pakistan (see box).

The Kalashnikov culture started with the talibanisation of Afghanistan. Successive government failed to check the flow of small arms into urban areas. The religious parties which were fragmented and electorally weak received a major boost when US attacked Khosht and other places in Afghanistan last year to eliminate Osama bin Laden and his terro-

Having trained, funded and launched militants in Afghanistan and Kashmir, Pakistan has the unenviable task of keeping them busy with a mission. The failure to do so would unleash their devastation inside Pakistan in the guise of Islamisation of the country

rist camps. The religious groups in turn attacked Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for conniving with the US. This forced Nawaz Sharif to push through the highly controversial Shariat Bill (15th amendment) through the National Assembly but it has still to be passed by the Senate.

The Jamaat-e-Islami under its chief Qazi Hussain Ahmad, organised a powerful three-day rally in Islamabad last year. This was the biggest show of force by the Jamaat-e-Islami and included 400 armed Hizb-e-Mujahideen. The political message of the congregation

mentalist

was to change Pakistan into an Islamic state. There were special speeches on the armed struggle in Kashmir, Palestine, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo. A film was also arranged on jihad in Kashmir.

A special declaration included a rejection of talks and friendship with India, support for Shariat and criticism of the government for socio-economic failures. Huge contributions were made to the jihad fund. The Jamaat-e-Islami demonstrated against the visit of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee during his reception in Lahore.

The sectarian violence has continued unabated. The killings are increasing



Fundamental elements

A who's who of militancy in Kashmir

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Islamic Society: The largest and the most articulate of Pak religious parties, was founded in 1941 by Maulana Abul Ala Maudidi. Presently Quazi Hussain Ahmed is its chief.

Jamaat-e-Ulema Islami (JUI): Formed in 1945, the JUI had undergone a number of organisational changes since 1947. Its support base is in NWFP and Baluchistan. JUI has not supported Zia's Islamisation programme. It actively participates in Pak politics and is being led by Maulana Fazlur Rahman.

Hizb-e-Islami (HeI) — Islamic Party: Afghan leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar founded the party in 1973 to organise political activities against the Daoud regime. The party emerged as the most powerful Jihad organisation with network throughout Afghanistan. He has close links with the JI and

received aid and weapons from Pakistan. Hekmatyar lost his relevance after the fall of Kabul in 1996.

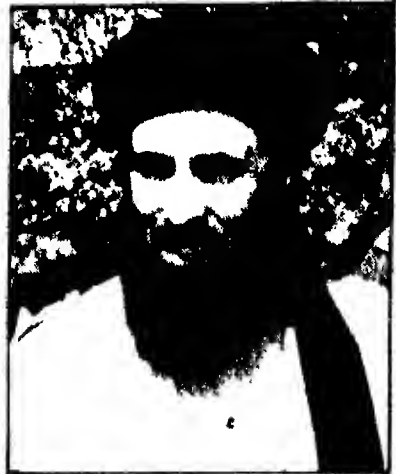
Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) — Party of Holy Warriors:

Having failed to win over JKLF to its side, the ISI manipulated the JI to promote JKLF to form a pro-Pak outfit in 1989. The group is led by S.A.S. Gillani and has an estimated membership of 4,500 Pak-trained cadres including war-hardened alien mercenaries. The political objective of the group is merger of J&K with Pakistan (through armed struggle).

Taliban — Religious

Scholars: The militia came into prominence during October '94, comprise students of religious schools (*madrassas*) in Baluchistan and NWFP, run by JUI. Subsequently, the ISI took over these

Qazi Hussain Ahmed



Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

institutions to extend training and moral and material support to Taliban. Mullah Mohammad Omar is the chief and controls about 90 per cent of Afghanistan.

Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) — Soldiers of Companions of the Prophet:

Founded as a sub-organisation of JUI in 1984, the SSP soon formally broke ranks with its parent party to adopt 'completely different line of struggle'. From a limited presence in Jhang, it has grown to become one of the largest religious parties in Punjab. They claim elimination of Shias as their top priority.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) —

Jhangvi's Army: Was founded in 1996. The group was named in memory of the SSP's assassinated chief Haq Nawaz Jhangvi. The organisation is devoted to jihad within the borders of Pakistan or more plainly 'anti-Shia terrorism'. Riaz Basra presently heads the organisation. This is held responsible for the recent Raiwind bomb blast allegedly planted to assassinate PMNS.





Harkat-ul-Mujahideen

(HuM): The organisation, earlier known as Harkat-ul-Ansar, was formed in 1993 after the merger of some splinter groups with a political objective of establishing supremacy of Islam all over the world and liberation of Muslim majority areas. HuM, led by Fazul Rehman Khalili, had initially fought the erstwhile USSR in Afghanistan and derives recruits from Muslim countries all over the world. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan essentially fund it. HuM is very active in J&K. Its cadres are known to be armed to the teeth and indulge in spectacular actions to gain publicity.

Markaz-e-Dawa Wal Irshad (MDI) — Centre for Islamic Invitation and Guidance:

The centre was established in 1987 in Muridke (Lahore) with a political objective of preparing a force to wage jihad against non-Muslims and stirring up liberation movements in areas such as Kashmir, Palestine, Bosnia etc. The centre has sent many jihad missions to Kashmir. The centre was co-founded by Zafar Iqbal and Hafiz Mohd Saeed.

Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) — Army of the Pure:

It is the militant wing of MDI and was

The Jamaat-e-Islami demonstrating

formed during Afghan crisis in early 80s. The cadres mainly consist of Afghans and Pak nationals. The group receives funds from Saudi Arabia and was inducted into the Kashmir valley in 1994. Ever since, the group is actively involved in Kashmir militancy. It is based in Punjab province and is currently headed by Hafiz Mohd Saeed.

Tehrik-e-Jafaria Pakistan (TJP) — Movement for Implementation of Jafria

Shariat of Shia Muslims: TJP started off as the Pak chapter of a movement to globalise the Khomeini (Iran) revolution. It draws military and financial support from Iran. The party was born following major success of Shia's protest movement against certain aspects of Zia's Islamisation laws.

Shipah-e-Mohd Pak (SMP) — Army of Prophet

Mohammad: A splinter group of the TJP, the SMP was formed to defend the respect due to the Shia Imams. The manifesto originated from SSP's decision to bring the Shia Imams under attack. The organisation is essentially anti-SSP.

every year. In 1997, 1200 persons were killed, while next year it was 1900 and so far this year, the figure is nearly 65. This includes at least one alleged assassination attempt on Nawaz Sharif. Unable to deal with the economic crisis, sectarian and ethnic violence and other secessionist movements, the Nawaz Sharif government has been forced to resort to appeasing Islamic forces.

Having whipped up public sentiment, no government in Pakistan can now

After whipping up public sentiment, no government in Pakistan can now afford to normalise relations with India without solving the Kashmir issue on its terms. Any government doing otherwise risks losing power either to the army or to the ISI and the fundamentalists

afford to normalise relations with India without solving the Kashmir issue on its terms. Any government doing otherwise risks losing power either to the army or the ISI and the fundamentalists. Kashmir rhetoric has become an inevitable compulsion. Even while succumbing to international pressure and playing the international card, Pakistan would like to be seen as a moderate Islamic state.

Kargil has further complicated the management of the fundamentalist forces. There are now reports that the personal bodyguards of Osama bin Laden known as Al Quaida are fighting alongside Harkat-ul-Ansar, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Al Badr.

Having trained, funded and launched militants in Afghanistan and Kashmir, Pakistan has the unenviable task of keeping them busy with a mission. The failure to do so would unleash their devastation inside Pakistan in the guise of Islamisation of the country. Pakistan is in a self-created trap of harnessing the backlash of the very forces it has created to shore up its Afghanistan and Kashmir policies.

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

Betrayed!

That's what a large number of Kashmiris feel after Nawaz Sharif assured Bill Clinton that he would persuade the militants to pull out of Kargil

Nawaz Sharif's "Yes" to Bill Clinton's diktat to pull out from Kargil must have come as welcome relief for all those who had feared a nuclear war between India and Pakistan. Equally, it also must have disappointed the sizeable chunk of the Kashmir population which wants the state to secede. To them, the Pak Prime Minister's decision is like an "abject surrender of a surrogate to his master's voice". Their point of view is this: the Kargil conflict provided a window to the world on the issue of Kashmir. But Nawaz Sharif undid it by succumbing to US pressure. And they aren't convinced by Sharif's pronouncements that Clinton had assured him that he would take a personal interest in speeding up the process of dialogue between India and Pakistan to find out a solution to the imbroglio.

"America has never been a trusted friend," says Zahoor Altaf, a university student. He was referring to the 7th Fleet which America had said it would send to help Pakistan in the 1971 war. "Twenty-eight years have passed since then, and the fleet is yet to reach the Karachi waters."

There are many in the militancy-torn Valley who think like Altaf. They have their reasons. The most basic among them is the longing for peace in a bloody land. They are convinced that this acrid climate of uncertainty cannot end unless both India and Pakistan shun their belligerence. And this can never be possible unless the issue of Kashmir is resolved. Which, in their mistaken belief, they think had a chance of getting sorted out by war — whatever the result — or an active international intervention.

It's easy to see their logic: for any international intervention, if not full-scale war, at least an atmosphere of war is necessary. And Kargil provided that opportunity.

Two hundred and fifteen kilometres north of Srinagar, Kargil is a treacherous mountainous ridge. Any event taking place here would hardly have any effect on the people in other parts of the state. Interestingly, people on the streets seem to know it. They genuinely believe that in the event of a war between India

Kashmiris who want to secede feel that Kargil provided a window to the world on the Kashmir issue. But Nawaz Sharif undid it by succumbing to US pressure



and Pakistan, Kashmir — notwithstanding the fact that the war would be fought over it — would be the safest place of all the cities of the two countries. Simple logic really: if there is a war, it is going to be fought in Delhi and Islamabad. Because both countries consider Kashmir as their own. "No one would like to drop a bomb on his own territory," says a minibus driver smugly.

What are the fallouts of the Kargil crisis? One immediate effect is that militancy, which had been relegated to second place in the past three years, appears to have staged a comeback. In the past three years or so, militants had to shift their base from urban locales to the relatively safer mountains and forests leaving the field almost open for leaders of political parties to parade their skills. After the Lok Sabha dissolved, political activity picked up. It sparked off another kind of showdown — between the All Party Hurriyat Conference, which is anti-election, and pro-election parties like the Congress, the National Conference and others. "But all this has receded into the background," says a shopkeeper at Bijbehara, south Kashmir.

If popular mood is any yardstick, people in general had begun distancing themselves from active militancy with a hope that some political solution was at hand. "But it didn't happen," says a teacher of a private school. People are dismayed, he says. And their disillusionment is giving rise to militant thinking again. Agrees Tahir Mohiuddin, editor of the prestigious Urdu weekly *Chattan*. "The militant thinking is again picking up," he says. Prof. Abdul Gani Butt of the All Party Hurriyat Conference confirms the trend. "Yes. The noise of politics is lost more often than not in the roar of guns."

On their part, the militants have intensified their activities even in the plains, finding their targets with chilling precision and frequency. Already, after the Kargil conflict broke out, more than two dozen security personnel, including several officers, have fallen to militants' bullets in the plains. In the Kangan area, on the Srinagar-Kargil highway, militants struck more than once killing 18 army men despite a round-the-clock vigil. "Kargil has boosted their morale," admits a senior Hurriyat leader. Police and civil authorities concede that militancy has increased in the plains. "Yes, militants have stepped up their activities," says a senior security forces offi-

cer. "But we are there to take on them. They will be checked."

There is yet another fallout of the Kargil crisis. As the conflict climaxed towards bloodier heights, the state's political leadership realised to their dismay that they were not only becoming irrelevant in the new scenario but that, Kashmir was turning into a bilateral issue between the warring countries. This, in

ment of Pakistan. Ever since militancy erupted in the Valley in 1989, Pakistan had all along tried to ensure that nothing should be attributed to it directly. Beyond saying that it was merely helping the people of Kashmir politically and diplomatically, it never accepted the charge of training and arming militants. But here, in the context of Kargil, Pakistan has sufficiently conveyed the message that it can physically get involved in



Abdul Gani Lone: "The LoC is not acceptable to the people of Kashmir. Those who have crossed it have not committed any offence"

effect, negates the basic APHC stand: that Kashmiris are the principal party to the dispute of Kashmir. The Hurriyat's political philosophy revolves around holding tripartite talks among India, Pakistan and the representatives of the Kashmiri people. The Hurriyat is opposed to all bilateral pacts and agreements, including the Lahore Declaration, and maintains that no bilateral solution between India and Pakistan is acceptable to it.

In an effort to make itself relevant to the situation, the Hurriyat Conference held a week-long demonstration in the capital city of Srinagar to show solidarity with those militants who had crossed over the LoC. More than a hundred activists were arrested. "The LoC is not acceptable to the people of Kashmir," thunders Hurriyat leader Abdul Gani Lone. "And those who have crossed it have not committed any offence." In this risky, murky war-zone, self-expression without rhetoric is a jab without a punch.

Yet, what has come as a surprise to many political analysts in the Kargil confrontation is the 'near direct' involve-

Kashmir if the demand arises. Why the sudden change of approach?

"I think the nuclear tests made all the difference," says Azam Inqalabi, a former militant leader and a senior separatist ideologue. "They feel emboldened...and think they can now see eye-to-eye with India." Which has effectively once again generated pro-Pakistan feelings in separatist circles. "The pro-Pakistan elements were already there," admits Inqalabi, "and Kargil must have come as a moral booster for them."

But then, that was only till 4 July. The mood in the Valley has once again changed. Ever since 5 July, when Nawaz Sharf assured Bill Clinton that he would persuade the militants to pull out of Kargil, the dominant feeling has been that of 'betrayal'. Now, the people are awaiting the response from the Pakistani military establishment and the militant outfits. What if they too succumb to the pressure? In that case, says a Hurriyat leader, "We will lose a golden opportunity." •

Rashid Ahmad/Srinagar

A big little man

Why can't Farooq Abdullah get his act together?

At about the same time the Bofors guns were booming to retake Tiger Hill on the war front, *shehnais* were playing at the Srinagar residence of chief minister Farooq Abdullah. The CM's daughter was getting married. And as a concession to the war, it was a simple, austere ceremony with no more than a hundred guests flown in from Delhi. The food was good and the hospitality warm, in keeping with the Abdullah tradition. The killing of villagers in south Kashmir as well as two rounds of massacres in Poonch (in which more than 20 people were gunned down by militants) earlier in the week was not permitted to mar the proceedings.

For the war-weary populace of the Kashmir valley, it was nothing new. This time Farooq Abdullah had an excuse: it isn't every day that a man gives his daughter away, so he was entitled to a little rest from his duties as CEO of Kashmir. But then Farooq Abdullah is not the most overworked chief minister in India. And the people of Kashmir know this.

Granted that a lot of injustice was done to Farooq Abdullah in the early days. His government was dismissed by the Indira Gandhi regime, and a quisling regime of G.M. Shah, his brother-in-law, installed instead. Election after election in Kashmir was rigged, making politics a perilous business in the tiny state.

But consider how much of this was because of Abdullah's own political irresponsibility. In a state where the people are political to their fingertips,

should the leader of a political party be indolent? The base of the National Conference has been shrinking over the years, the vacant space being gobbled up by various shades of political militants.

Has Farooq Abdullah ever tried to sell a political programme for the resurgence of his state? Has he ever said that he is tired of accepting doles from the Centre, and that the people of Kashmir must return something to the country they've opted to stay with?

In fact, has Farooq Abdullah done any other kind of politics except the politics of blackmail — the 'take care



Maybe some day, someone will write that Farooq Abdullah has matured into a statesman and a leader of men. But today, he's just a lazy, irresponsible politician who knows he represents the TINA factor for the Centre

of us or we have other options' kind of politics? Should Kashmir let him get away with this *enfant terrible* approach, while innocent people pay with their lives?

It is not all of Abdullah's fault. A chief minister cannot function normally if he is constantly under the shadow of militancy. Consider the states in the north-east. Is life for any of them normal?

The issue is not so much Kashmir's problems as a state. But Abdullah's own, as a leader. When Bengal feels marginalised as a cultural influence, it tries to reinvent itself by renaming its cities. When Shiv Sena finds it is becoming unpopular, it becomes more militantly anti-Muslim.

However, Kashmir has none of these problems. It is top of the mind recall. Then why can't Farooq Abdullah get his act together, take law and order in hand firmly and clean up the state administration? In short, get down to some real work, instead of sitting back and letting the administration slide so that Kashmir appears in the headlines for all the wrong reasons?

One would have thought that with a war going on on the border, hours away from Srinagar, Abdullah would have taken greater care to ensure that the people of Kashmir felt safe.

This is not an insurmountable hurdle. Much of the Indian Army is on the border. As it is, the soldier to citizen ratio in Kashmir is four to one. But these days, security deployment is at its highest. Nobody, least of all the home ministry, wants a conflagration in Kashmir as a war rages. All Abdullah needed to have done was to provide a reasonable threat perception to the Union ministry and security forces would have poured into Kashmir.

But that is if he had known where the threat was coming from. Militants crept in, gunned down families in villages and slipped out again. The war was going on between two nations. The ones caught in the crossfire were ordinary people.

Maybe some day, someone will write that Farooq Abdullah has matured into a statesman and a leader of men. But today, he's just a lazy, irresponsible politician who knows he represents the TINA factor for the Centre, and is content being a small-time politician. •



ASHOK VAHIA

'Because I was a s

The reason why Nadeem feels he has been persecuted

INTERVIEWED BY SUMIT DAS GUPTA/LONDON

On the morning of 12 August, 1997, Gulshan Kumar was gunned down near a Shiva temple in Andheri, Bombay. The murder of the monarch of the T-Series music empire sent shock waves through the film industry. Hardly had these subsided when police commissioner R.H. Mendonca dropped a bombshell on Bollywood. On 1 September, he named Nadeem Saifi as "the prime suspect" in the Gulshan Kumar murder case.

Life, for the better half of the hugely successful Nadeem-Shravan music duo, changed overnight. Nadeem was living in London at that time. His passport was revoked within a couple of days. He was arrested by Interpol on 17 September, taken to the Bow Street Magistrate's Court in Covent Garden and released on bail.

Twenty-one months and several hearings later, it was supposed to be judgement day on 30 June, 1999, in the Government of India (actually, the Crown Prosecution Service) v Nadeem Saifi extradition case (on grounds of "murder" and "conspiracy to murder"). The night before, the Indian high commission (IHC) had been asked to "prepare for the worst".

The buzz in Bombay was that the magistrate would decide to exclude the controversial confession of Ali Shaikh, thus crippling the Maharashtra Police's case against Nadeem. The mood in the defendant's camp was brighter, his lawyers quite convinced that the morrow would bring good news.

But by 10.35 am on Wednesday, the balance had shifted dramatically. Magistrate Christopher Pratt "denied to exclude" Shaikh's confession, observed that contrary to the defence's claims the "hearings between the 18th September 1997 and the 28th November 1997" (in Bombay) seemed to have been conducted in "a completely fair and exemplary manner", and deferred the case till 10 September as a "number of questions remain unanswered".

The sense of relief at the IHC was palpable, especially with foreign secretary K. Raghunath engaged in talks with the British government on the Kargil crisis. "This case is crucial. If it goes against us, it will set a dangerous precedent and could open the floodgates for Muslims seeking asylum here," confessed a senior IHC official.

For Nadeem — represented by top criminal lawyer Clive Nicholls — this was a body blow. But his counsel in Bombay, Majeed Memon, refused to read too much into the interim order.

"In Maharashtra, the police are jubilant because they have an erroneous idea that they have won the case. There is a deep-rooted conspiracy, a vicious witch-hunt to implicate Nadeem. But he will be proved innocent in the end," Memon told SUNDAY.

A week before appearing in court (a Wednesday, the day he



"I am very sad that I have come to a stage when I do not want to go back to my country. I am a patriotic Indian. I do not blame my country or my countrymen for my predicament"

Successful Muslim'

has to report to Wembley police station every week) and again a few hours after the court proceedings, Nadeem spoke to SUNDAY about the twist in the tale. Excerpts:

SUNDAY: Do you view today's court order as a serious setback?

Nadeem Saifi: No, no, not at all. It simply means that the matter has been pushed back till 20 September, in order to give more time to both sides to try and answer the questions that 'remain unanswered' in the case. I am 100 per cent innocent and, believe me, I will leave no stone unturned to prove it.

Q: But the government of Maharashtra has hailed it as a "victory".

A: There is no need for them to be jubilant, or for us to be disheartened. We have lots of evidence against the police that we have not used yet.

Q: With the magistrate 'declining to exclude' Ali Shaikh's confession, will you now have to change tack and play the human rights violation card?

A: I don't think there is any need to change our strategy. We will go on fighting for justice from the same platform. Human rights violation is a genuine aspect of what they have done to me, and we are ready to appeal to the highest authority about this. I am telling you, this is not the end of my fight, it is just the beginning.

Q: Well, let's go back to the very beginning. How do you look back at the events of August-September 1997?

A: (Long pause) I think of it as the biggest tragedy that could have befallen me. I am a very, very sad man today. Firstly, from the very feeling of how an innocent man could feel in a situation as horrendous as this and secondly, for the hundreds and thousands of innocent people who have suffered before me and who will suffer after me at the hands of these crooks in uniform.

Q: You were supposed to return to India at that time...

A: Yes, I was supposed to return, my ticket was confirmed. My wife was unwell at that time. She miscarried. We buried the baby in London. Thereafter, my passport was revoked on 4 September, within 48 hours, which is quite unprecedented.

It is now clear to us why they revoked it in such a hurry. They obviously did not want me to come back [to India] at that time. It was all a well-connived conspiracy by the police against me. So, in this case, the police are the conspirators against me.

Q: What do you think the objective of this conspiracy was?

A: The objective was to cover up the incapability of finding the real culprits in such a short time that the government had given them. They were given a warning that the law-and-order situation would have to be immediately rectified. So they wanted a scapegoat. And they saw a scapegoat in me. Because I was a successful Muslim. I am sorry to use this ter-

minology. But there are people in positions of power who are very, very biased and who could go to any extent to do harm.

Q: So who were the chief conspirators?

A: Gopinath Munde, the home minister, and some senior police officials of Bombay. Now that we have gone through the entire case, we are convinced that there was no admissible evidence against me. So, on 1 September, when the commissioner announced my name at the behest of R.S. Sharma, the additional (or joint) commissioner, and K.L. Prasad and others, it was pure...nonsense. It was a cock and bull story. It was all concocted and fabricated. But I am going to fight till I get justice. With God above, I have nothing to fear from these vultures...

And then there must have been certain people in the indus-



Gulshan Kumar: his murder stirred up a hornets' nest

try whom I must have annoyed during my career. Whose films I must have refused, whose shows I must have refused, due to genuine lack of time. The stakes are so high there, people who don't get to sign you when you are very successful, definitely feel very upset and they could go to any extent to destroy you.

Q: Does it all point to an underworld-Bollywood-police nexus?

A: I would refrain from commenting on that. But one thing is for sure. The police are extremely corrupt, extremely dangerous, extremely untrustworthy. Well, some of them. I will not make a general statement because I do know of a lot of police officers who are doing their job with honesty and integrity. But there are many, like those who have conspired to destroy

my name, my career, my family.

But to no avail. They are unsuccessful. They have not been able to destroy me and they will not be able to destroy me. The people at large have shown their faith in me. My latest film, *Surf Tum*, is a mega hit. That just goes to show that passively, the people are voting for me. What else does one want, with God above and the people's voice with you?

Q: But shouldn't the ultimate blame of a conspiracy lie with the political masters?

A: Yes, the ultimate blame should go to the politicians. In my case, Gopinath Munde, who was trying to be a hero, when he is not one. But the police should not be just the slave of the political masters. I know of some police officials, senior officers, who have the guts to say no to any damn politician.

But there are also many stooges... They should definitely be thrown out of the police forces because the citizens are endangered by such police officers having charge of such important posts. They are ruthless. They don't care. They are encouraging excess policing, as they call it. Honest law-abiding citizens need honest, lawful policemen who are not crooks in uniform. How can anyone feel safe?

Q: After all this, if you are in a position to choose, do you see yourself going back to Bombay and starting all over again?

A: No. Never. I am afraid of Munde and his *goondes* (laughs)... I just don't trust them anymore. As long as the home office is in the hands of the likes of Gopinath Munde and the police force is run by the kind of senior officials who've been on my case, as long as people like these are hovering around like vultures, I'm not going to fall prey to them... I would love to return to India. But I feel safe in London. I fear for my life, and the lives of my children and my immediate family, there.

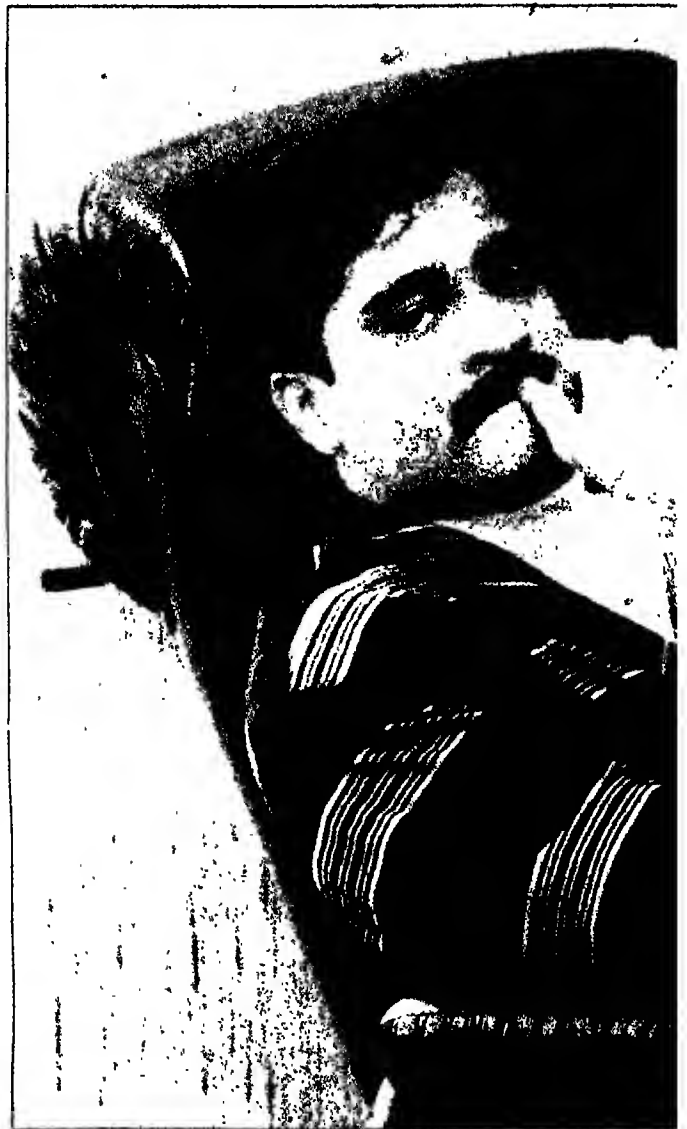
Q: So is it life without music now?

A: No, no. Never. I am recording songs. I am determined to first prove my innocence and then come forward again. But then, my films have continued to be hits. *Pardes* got me an award, the *Screen* award, two months after these people had accused me. This was the people's way of telling them that 'look we don't believe your bullshit story. We know this man, we love his music, and we'll stick by him'.

And now, there will be better music, I can assure you (laughs). I have my work permit here. If my producers feel that my work is good for them, I will welcome it with open arms.



"The ultimate blame should go to the politicians. In my case, Gopinath Munde, who was trying to be a hero, when he is not one"



Q: And will it continue to be the Nadeem-Shravan partnership?

A: Yeah. Yeah. Definitely. That national integration will never break. That's what they wanted to do. To break that Hindu-Muslim unity, which we will never let go. Never.

Q: But is it feasible, or will East and West have to meet midway?

A: (Laughs) No, why not London and Bombay? If so many businesses can be run like that, if power generated in one place can go to another place, why not music? It's just a phone call away.

Q: How has the British government treated you?

A: Oh, they have been very, very nice. I have met the Prime Minister and some other senior officials, not in connection with my case, but at receptions... I am grateful to the home office here, to my lawyers, and to the people at large. They have taken a very compassionate view. And my Asian brothers here have been great. They see me on the streets, come up and wish me luck, give me the 'thumbs up' and encourage me to go on.



Q: There has been talk of your alleged links with Dawood...

A: No, this is absolutely false. There is absolutely no truth in that

Q: Any interaction with the Indian high commission?

A: With extreme respect to them, I have never had the opportunity of meeting anyone from the Indian high commission.

Q: How have you managed to sustain the financial pressures of living in London and carrying out such an expensive, protracted court case?

A: For that I am grateful to a select few of my very good friends who have stood beside me in my hour of need. Because at the beginning I had no money at all. But now, thanks to their support, and thanks to the God Almighty, I have come to a stage where I can actually fight it out in court and prove my innocence.

Q: In this connection, there has been talk of your alleged links with Dawood...

A: No, this is absolutely false. There is absolutely no truth in that.

Q: Are there people in India who have stood by you?

A: Oh yes, there have been people, both within the industry and outside...But this crisis has taught me a lot. I have seen through so many things. I have seen friends who ran away. And these were the people who would at one time say 'Are hum tumhare liye kuch bhi kar sakte hain (We can do anything for you),' and now they are not even ready to pick up the phone! I used to make test runs, by just calling them. But I stopped when I realised I was just ending up hurting myself. Those people I have done good to have back stabbed me

Q: What effect has all this had on your family?

A: That's one thing for which I will never forgive the people who have done this to me. The effect it has had on my family, my children. I feel so sickened when I think of my aged parents back in India. This is the time when I should support them, but they are running helter-skelter ..

Q: Have they faced any kind of persecution?

A: No, no they dare not trouble my parents

Q: How do you feel about the way you have been treated by your country?

A: I am very sad that I have come to a stage when I do not want to go back to my country. I am a patriotic Indian. I do not blame my country or my countrymen for my predicament. I blame a few corrupt, dangerous people. These people have to be ridiculed the way they have ridiculed me. Otherwise they will never learn. *Unki darindgi ki khunak unki badh chuki hai* (Their viciousness has reached such proportions that) they will go on doing this kind of thing

Q: But haven't you made their job easier by often being brash and loud-mouthed? For instance, your outburst against Gulshan Kumar...

A: That was just hype. But yeah, maybe yeah. I agree with what you say. But I don't regret it at all. Because I have always spoken for the truth. And I increasingly feel that we are all becoming like eunuchs. We don't really say what we feel and do what is right, and the results are there for all to see

We need upright people who are willing to even stake their lives to improve the conditions prevailing in the country, to expose wrongdoing and bring the truth to light. It's time for people to take a stand against this ruthlessness. If this is encouraged, or not opposed, it'll go to a point beyond repair.

Q: Do you feel that Muslims in Bombay are insecure today?

A: Yes, there is a general feeling of insecurity among Muslims. Police atrocities are definitely there. That Muslim bias does exist. It is because of good, like-minded Hindu brothers who still believe in unity and love, that there is still hope.

But it is time for a good government to decide the future of the Muslims, because if they are going to be treated shabbily and all the time be under the threat of being persecuted...It's not a good feeling at all. It is time for a positive signal to come from the government, before it is too late. •



SANJAY KUMAR

The Indian Armed Forces are giving the Pakistan Army and infiltrators backed by it, a befitting reply in the Kargil, Dras and Batalik sectors in Jammu and Kashmir. At the same time, the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, too, is equally aggressive in firing salvos against Pakistan to garner support on both national and international level.

In a series of attacks against Pakistan, the Prime Minister and his entourage comprising the Union finance minister Yashwant Sinha and Union minister of state for forest and environment Babulal Marandi, and a host of state BJP leaders vent their ire against Pakistan as well as political opponents on 25 June in Patna.

Using the skirmish-turned-confrontation in Kargil as an issue to score over other political parties, the BJP hurriedly called a Rashtra Raksha Rally at the historic Gandhi Maidan in Patna. However, it is a matter of debate whether the rally was organised keeping in view the war-like situation in Kargil or the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

Speaking at the rally, Atal Behari Vajpayee warned Pakistan that it had already lost a lot in the past three misadventures. "But Pakistan will have to make it clear before the war is declared,

On The Warpath

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee attacks Pakistan and his political opponents at a rally in Patna

what areas it is ready to lose," bellowed Vajpayee.

"In the last 27 years there was no conflict over the LoC, now there is a fight going on to maintain the status quo ante," he explained. "It is not just infiltrators, our forces are, in fact, fighting the Pakistan Army which is backing the intruders," he added.

Making a point to enlighten the mas-

ses attending the rally, Vajpayee stated that when there was a war with Pakistan for the first time, it had tried to grab Kashmir. The second time, it attacked India to grab the Kutch. The third time, it had to wash its hands off Bangladesh. "Everytime it lost. And now fighting is on for the fourth time and it is also not known, what it might have to lose," said the PM.



SANJAY KUI

However, attacking Pakistan was not the only reason why Vajpayee had come to Patna. "It was the job of the Opposition to go for a no-confidence motion. But ironically, the government had to go for a confidence motion," said Vajpayee. "*Jo log paanch minute mein sarkar banane ka daava kar rahe the, woh ek mahine mein bhi sarkar nain bana paye*," he added.

Considered as an appropriate stage to flag off the election campaign for the BJP, the Rashtra Raksha Rally, though convened to enlighten the people about the ongoing conflict at the LoC, deviated instead to elections and the "Laloo-Rabri misrule in Bihar".

Even Vajpayee made it clear when he said, "I have not come here to talk about elections. Polls come and go, it is to maintain solidarity in the country keeping in view the threat from Pakistan." However, its another story that he, too, could not refrain himself from bringing up the topic of confidence motion and incompetence of the Opposition in forming an alternate government.

Almost all the speakers at the rally had two things to talk about: One, the Kargil conflict. Two, politics in Bihar. Repeated appeals to unite against the RJD government in Bihar were made and the final political stroke came when leaders declared to make Atal Bihari Vaj-

Speaking at a large rally, Prime Minister Vajpayee warned Pakistan that it had already lost a lot in the past three misadventures against India. And that Pakistan now had to make it clear, before declaring war, what areas it is going to lose

payee the Prime Minister of India for the second time. The crowd enjoyed the snide remarks made at the Laloo-Rabri regime. In other words, the plain message of the rally was to rout the Rabri Devilised RJD government in Bihar in the polls.

The state BJP president, Nand Kishore Yadav, spoke about the apathy of the RJD government towards the development of the state. He said that in the last 15 months, the Union government sanc-

tioned projects worth Rs 25,0000 crore in Bihar, but the state government has done nothing about it.

In his tirade against Laloo Yadav, the Leader of the Opposition in Bihar Assembly, Sushil Kumar Modi charged: "Though Laloo calls himself a brother of a *chaprasi*, he has three houses in Patna. I had been to Laloo's marriage as a *baraatt* and saw that Rabri's father did not even have a *bigha* of land. But look at the transformation now."

Meanwhile, the Union defence minister, George Fernandes, on his way to Rajgir in Nalanda district for an assessment of the progress of work of the Ordnance factory, said that no time limit has been set for flushing out the infiltrators. "Till all the intruders are chased out or wiped out, Operation Vijay will continue," said Fernandes. "Moreover, one should not take Pakistan's nuclear threat lightly," he added. The defence minister, however, denied that the chief of army staff V.P. Malik had advised that the LoC should be crossed.

However, the same day in Pune, Prime Minister Vajpayee said "if the instigation from Pakistan became intolerable, India will not remain patient". The Prime Minister also declared that "at an opportune moment, India will decide when the LoC needs to be crossed". •

Naved Zahr/Patna

IT'S REMO, FOLKS!

Recipe for irresistible pleasure cocktail: rain dance on a Saturday night and **Remo Fernandes** singing live. And to hell with patriotism. At a weekend splash in the capital, Delhi-ites literally soaked up the Goanese singer's folksy pop oblivious of the traffic jam that the water trawlers were causing in the more sober realms outside. For Remo, who took six years to bring out his last album, the tour was one good thing that happened. Not for those stuck with their cars in the snarl. One guy, caught in the middle, seethed: "There's a war on, our men are dying and something like this doesn't make much sense." Of course it doesn't. Since when has sense accompanied wet revellers in search of orgasmic bliss?



HAPPY NUPTIALS

Two of our biggest stars got married



JAVAGAL SRINATH

Occupation: Fast bowler

Famous for: Not the aggro sort. In an age where fast bowlers are chronically violent types, he's one of the few good-natured guys around. Recently adjudged faster than Glenn McGrath

Got married to: S. Jyotsna, a student of Delhi's Lady Shriram College who moved to Bangalore



ANIL KUMBLE

Occupation: Leg-spin bowler

Famous for: The only spinner who doesn't spin and the only player in recent times to have scalped ten in an innings. Also a genuine gentleman on the field

Got married to: Chetana, a girl from Mysore. She was earlier with a travel agency

INTERESTING POINT: Both tied the knot on the same day — 1 July

HERE COMES THE NORWEGIAN SALMON

The salmon sizzled on the frying pan. "It has arrived," announced the Norwegian chef, "the salmon from Norway has reached the shores of India." At the press conference in a Delhi five-star hotel to launch the fish in India, organisers went to the extent of actually demonstrating some of the dishes one could make with it. Apparently, the salmon, which forms 90 per cent of Norway's fish export, also cracked the Chinese market — but only after a little marketing gimmick. Realising that the Chinese don't readily take to things not traditional, sales experts thought up a cooking competition for the best recipe with the fish. And *voila!* it worked: in no time there were dozens of them and all in Chinese style. Should be a hit here as well. At the launch, when an inquisitive journo raised his hand for a clarification, the lady sitting beside him whispered "*mat poochhna, bhookh lagi hai*". He obliged.



EXORCISING THE GOST



Your book is translated into 40 languages, sells over a trillion copies, yet you want to get away from it all? After the *God Of Small Things* cult that she unwittingly spawned, novelist **Arundhati Roy**, who became poorer by Rs 15 lakh when she donated generously to the Narmada Bachao movement, says, "I began to feel every little thing in the book was being turned into a silver coin and the only way to escape was to go back to the world where my book was drawn." Her forays into the Narmada valley have now translated into a 17,000-word essay in the form of — yeah, you guessed right! — another book, *The Greater Common Good*.

Question: will the book have the same effect as her Booker Prize-winning one? Tough to predict. For the moment though, the ghost of GOST is proving a difficult one to exorcise.

Film stars don't always have it easy — the wriggle to stardom is often fraught with peril. **Rani Mukherjee**, voluptuous, honey-voiced heroine, recently had a narrow escape while doing a scene of a skating competition. The problem was, neither Rani nor her co-star Mayuri Kango knew how to skate. So despite being tied to the ceiling by a metallic cable, the two collided. Rani fainted, as the whole cable fell on her, but except for a gash on the forehead, escaped unhurt and was back after a six-hour rest. Director Raj Kanwar didn't oblige her request for a cancellation of the shoot.



NARROW ESCAPE

“IT’S
A
FORM
OF
ART
ONE
CAN
WEAR



Streetstyle: "liberal" menswear with unorthodox motifs — Egyptian figurines, Chinese dragons and Sanskrit script embroidered on traditional Indian garments. Q&A with the designer at Oxford Bookstore, Gallery, Cal., where a selection of her work was on view.

1. The following information is being furnished to you for your information only. It is not intended to be used for any other purpose.

It's a fact: When I began in '91, the concept was new. I had no models or people that I could emulate or learn from. I had to figure out what I wanted to do on my own.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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1998

...and he's a very good person. You don't expect to
...and he's a very good person. You don't expect to
...and he's a very good person. You don't expect to

SISTER ACT

Uzra Butt and Zohra Segal reunite after 40 years to share the spotlight on a London stage

They were both dancers in Uday Shankar's dance troupe, both leading ladies at the Prithvi Theatre in Bombay in the 1940s and both completely devoted to the arts. Those were the days when Zohra Segal and Uzra Butt, sisters, had the theatre and dance world at their feet.

But they went their different ways after marriage. Uzra travelled to Pakistan in 1960 because her husband was ill and the family was there. Zohra remained in India and then travelled to Britain. Forty years later they came together again on stage, in a play that was roughly based on their lives. It was the sort of story every scriptwriter would dream of writing, the story of sisters separated, a metaphor for a country divided.

After packed shows in India and Pakistan, *Aik Thi Nani* came to London as part of the Chor Bizarre Theatre Festival. The play is about a conservative family in Pakistan where the grandmother (Uzra Butt) is the matriarch. But a visit from her sister, the Nani from India (Zohra Segal), changes the family for ever.

With the guns booming presently over Kargil, this Indo-Pak stage venture on British soil seemed even more poignant.

"I feel very strongly about it [Kargil]," Zohra Segal told SUNDAY. "What are the politicians up to? Why can't we live like friendly neighbours? I see such enthusiasm when I go to Pakistan, it is very sad."

Segal even put in a line at the end of the play when the Nani is returning to

India, saying "Ab to milte rahenge, ab to bus bhi hai, bus abhi ruki to nahin?" At a Delhi show, she had similarly ad-libbed, "Ab to bus bhi chal rahi hai," to howls of laughter from the audience.

Butt moved to Pakistan in 1960. She had been in Prithvi Theatre from 1944 to '58, playing the female lead to Pirthviraj Kapoor who was apparently fascinated by her charm and good looks. She married Hamid Butt, a script writer, and moved to Pakistan when he fell ill.

"It was very painful moving away from home," said Butt. "I was homesick, I hated leaving India, there was so much to do in India. I felt I was in a cultural vacuum in Pakistan. Still I tried to adjust myself. I started teaching drama to a few girls in school."

"In 1965, Pakistan started its first television programmes. I did a small programme — extracts from some of my plays in which I played three different women without changing my dress or make-up. I still remember the night it was telecast. We were having a small party at home, and after it was over, my husband jumped up and hugged me and said, 'At last you have found a way of expressing yourself again.' He knew I was missing my art, missing the theatre."

In *Ek Thi Nani* Uzra plays the role of a conservative senior citizen who doesn't want her grand-daughter to take up acting. "Politics has made a lot of difference," she said. "People want to act. Things are changing slowly in Pakistan. Parents are not keen to see their girls on stage, but they don't mind them acting on television. But it is still difficult to

SHRABANI BASU



have a stage career for a girl."

Butt joined the Pakistan theatre group Ajoka in 1983 and has been acting with them since. The group does only contemporary plays focussing on relevant themes.

She is delighted to be able to share the archights with her sister after 40 years. "It was a great joy acting with her, but it was also a great challenge," she said. "Zohra has been acting throughout, but I have been in theatre on and off. I had to gather all my courage to act with her. My role was more difficult. I play a subdued woman, a prejudiced person, who gradually changes. She has to break out of a shell. That was difficult."

Zohra Segal, 87, is the older and the more famous of the two. She began her career in Prithvi Theatre and then moved on to Uday Shankar's dance troupe. Quite a sensation in the forties and the fifties, Zohra moved to Delhi in 1959 where she worked with the Natya Akade-

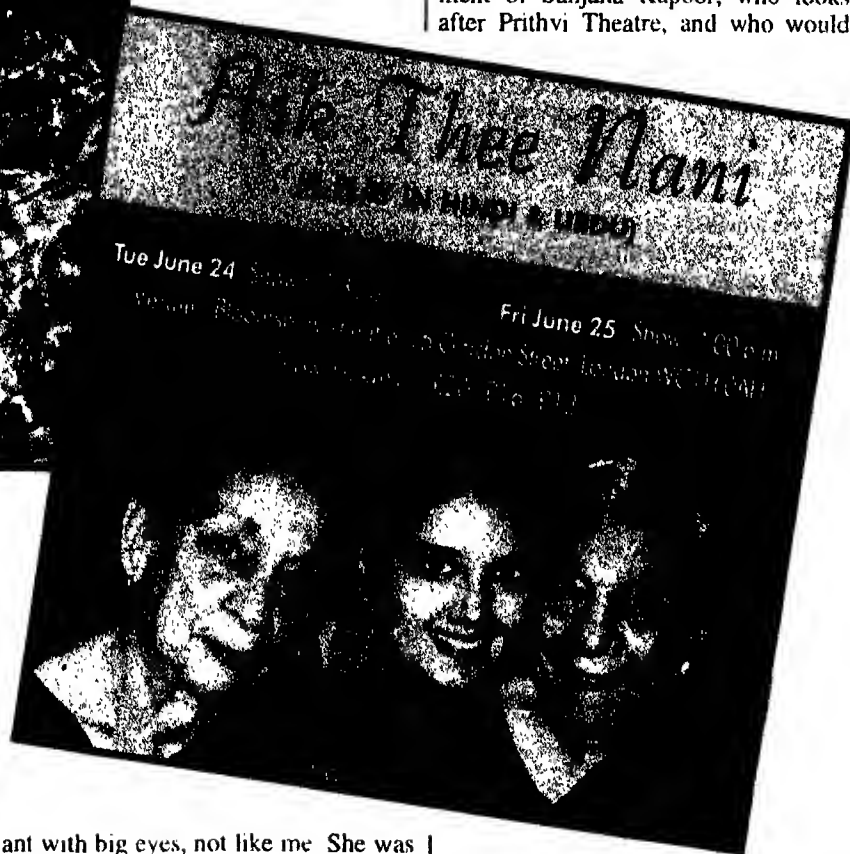


"Zohra has been acting throughout, but I have been in theatre on and off," says Uzra (left). "I had to gather all my courage to act with her"

For Segal had continued with her theatre and dance career, whereas circumstances had forced Butt to give her career a break. For both, acting together after 40 years had been a moving and emotional experience.

As for the play, after successful runs in Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore, where it had to be staged at neutral venues like the British Council and Max Mueller Bhavan, for it was perceived as being against the two-nation theory and too critical of Pakistan, *Aik Thi Nani* was expected to travel to Chandigarh and Calcutta. But given the present political climate, the cast and crew are heading straight back to Lahore, rather than do more shows in India.

The play has not been allowed to enter Bombay, much to the disappointment of Sanjana Kapoor, who looks after Prithvi Theatre, and who would



mi. She came to Britain in 1960 after her dancer husband, Kameshwar Segal, died. The war with China broke out and she was stranded in Britain.

"I didn't get any work," recalls Zohra Segal. "Who would give me anything? I was flat-chested, big-hipped and 50 years old at the time. It was a struggle to stay on board."

But her dedication to her work was unquestionable and perseverance paid off. Soon she was making her mark in television serials like *Partition* and *Tandoori Nights* and more recently in films like *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Masala*.

Initially it wasn't so heartbreaking when her sister Uzra moved to Pakistan, because they would meet every two years in London, but then the visits could not be so frequent. Segal admits that there was some rivalry between the sisters when they were both in Bombay. She says she didn't realise it at first but now knows that there was.

"Uzra was so beautiful, tall and eleg-

ant with big eyes, not like me. She was gentle and kind and everybody loved her. I was vicious and mean and stingy. She was a challenge to me," laughs Segal, adding, "I am grateful for that challenge. For it showed me the way to become a good dancer. I worked doubly hard. In so many ways it was Uzra who inspired me and made me bring out my best."

Ironically, after all these years, it was Uzra who felt the jitters when she shared the stage with her more-famous sister.

have liked nothing better than to see the two leading ladies of her grandfather's theatre company coming together after 40 years to act in a historic play. "Prithvi Theatre would be the perfect setting, but it still has to happen," says Sanjana.

Meanwhile, the sisters will go back to their homes in two different countries with the memory of a reunion they will always cherish. •

Shrabani Basu/London

*The media-shy
Wipro chief is now the
world's richest Indian*

Premji's

It is a classic case of *money can't buy happiness*. For Azim Hasham Premji, the 54-year-old chairman of Wipro Limited, riches have meant more trouble than happiness.

Last month, *Forbes* magazine declared him the 'richest Indian in the world'. Now 177th in the world rich-list, Premji has beaten Lakshmi N. Mittal, the London-based NRI to become the richest Indian.

But he does not seem to be ecstatic over the just-acquired distinction. In fact, he is losing a lot of sleep over how to duck camera lights and unsolicited media attention that his new status has brought.

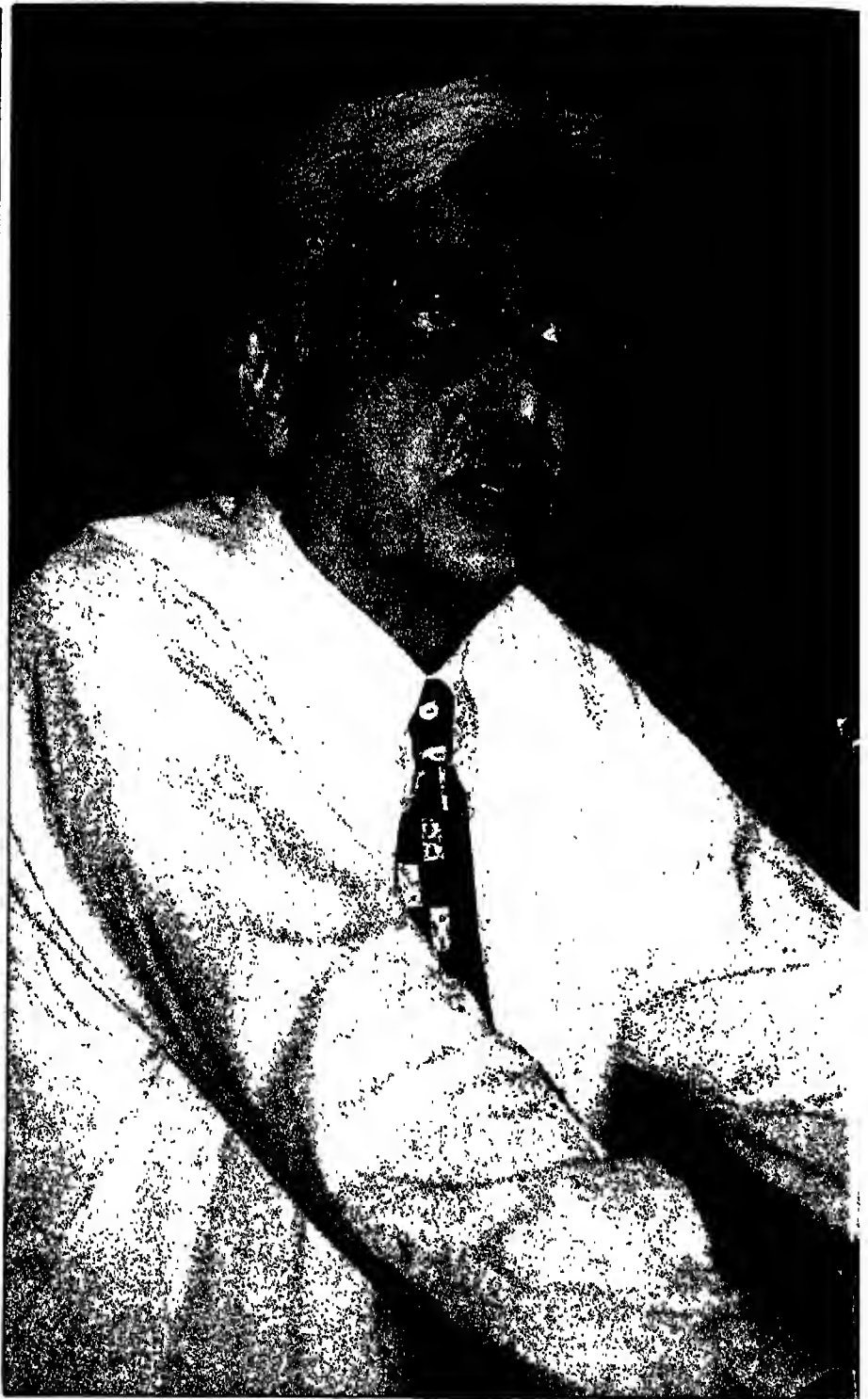
The trouble is — with the US\$ 2.8 billion tag now firmly attached to him — the showcasing is bound to happen. Specially if one happens to hold 76 per cent of the equity in a multi-billion dollar company.

However, the money may have come fast but it entailed a long and rough ride uphill.

It began with a 22-year-old dropping out of an engineering course at Stanford University, USA and rushing back to Bombay to take over the reins of a small vegetable oil company after the death of his father in 1966. He had inherited an oil mill in the obscure town of Almaner in Maharashtra. A journey that began with the sunflower brand of vegetable oil, made it to one of the biggest software and hardware companies in India. The sunflower insignia went on to become the logo of Wipro and is likely to go places for sometime, before the sunflower fully blooms.

The rise and rise of Premji, by any standards, is quite a phenomenal transformation within a span of 30 years.

From taking over Western India Vegetable Products to heading Wipro, a leader in the IT sector, Premji has taken each step forward cautiously. Wipro was amongst the first family businesses to induct professional managers, hiring staff from the Indian Institute of Manage-



billions

ment way back in the mid-seventies. In fact, Premji had already started talking about 'ethical practices' and 'professionalism' long before they became fashionable corporate mantras.

And yet, the reticent Premji is extremely conservative when it comes to business. That is one reason why he is not willing to let go of the traditional vegetable oil and soaps business that he inherited as his first business venture. The logic is simple: if it's making a profit, why not?

Within the company many feel that it 'lowers the tone' of a hi-tech IT business. But for the chairman, the incompatibility between Wipro Shikakai soap and Wipro Infotech Enterprise Solutions is inconsequential. It's the profit that matters. Maybe that's one reason why he's amassed all that much money.

He is not averse to radical changes, as long as they fit into his scheme of events. Three years ago, Premji, along with his business headquarters, shifted from Bombay to Bangalore. It was a carefully calculated move. Since most of the Wipro businesses — hardware, software and maintenance — were all in Bangalore, the idea was to be at the helm of affairs rather than keep a close watch from another part of the country.

Azim Hasham
Premji is not willing
to let go of the
vegetable oil and
soaps business that
he started out with.
It's the profit that
matters

And his company is steadily expanding. With a worldwide network and a joint venture with General Electric, a US-based corporate giant — things have just started to happen.

Today he is the father of two grown-up sons, one working for GE and the other studying commerce at a Bangalore



L.N. Mittal: now second to Premji on the rich-list

college. But Premji denies grooming his sons so that they can take over from him. He has gone on record saying that his sons need not necessarily inherit the Wipro empire if they do not come up to the scratch. But given the 76 per cent holding, it could hardly be any other way.

Premji's wife Yasmeen is a post-graduate from a US university. Earlier, she was on the staff of the *Inside Outside* magazine. Like Premji, all his family members prefer staying away from the spotlight.

In fact, the only person Premji seems to be comfortable talking about is probably his father. He narrates an interesting anecdote about how his father refused to go to Pakistan despite being personally



Milestones

The rise and rise of Wipro Limited

- **1945:** Incorporation of Western India Vegetable Products Limited
- **1977:** Name changed to Wipro Products Limited
- **1980:** Diversifies into Information Technology
- **1982:** Name changed to Wipro Limited
- **1990:** A joint venture with GE Medical System
- **1996:** Corporate headquarters shifted from Bombay to Bangalore
- **1999:** Chairman of Wipro Limited declared the richest Indian by Forbes magazine

invited by Mohanmad Ali Jinnah at the time of Partition. Apparently, Jinnah had requested him to be a minister in his government and even choose his own ministry. According to Premji, this was one thing his father was clear about: India was his home.

And as for Premji, he seems to have chosen the same path. And the one thing that he seems to be clear about is to be amongst the top ten companies of India in the shortest possible time.

Which probably explains his quite unusual favourite hobby — hiking.

He is just too fascinated by heights. •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore

Captain

Will changing captains help? Does India have a future in world cricket?



THE TEMPO WAS HYSTERICAL, the build-up, feverish. Television, radio, advertising, packaging, marketing...it was about everything but cricket. It doesn't get any bigger than this, announced sundry celebrities authoritatively. It certainly didn't.

And, when India lost out on World Cup 1999 resoundingly, the search for the Bad Boy in the pack started with equal vengeance. "Because of him...it's because of him," screeched former Indian captains in unison, about Azharuddin, soon-to-be-deposed captain of the Indian team.

Cricket matches are lost for many reasons. Sometimes they're fixed and, therefore, pre-ordained to lose. Bad weather slows down the pace. The team hasn't

Cool, confident and articulate, Ajay Jadeja has been known to motivate his teammates in a way very few can. His 'relaxed yet aggressive' style is infectious

to be?



Md Azharuddin: After India's failure at World Cup 1999, the search for the Bad Boy in the pack started with a vengeance. "It's because of him," screeched former Indian captains in unison

Talented, non-controversial and committed, Sachin Tendulkar leads by example. But will the burden of captaincy weigh too heavy on India's Most Valuable Player?





Tendulkar pacifying the crowd at Eden Gardens in February, 1999, at the Indo-Pak match, after sections of it turned violent

worked hard enough and doesn't have back-up logistical support. Team spirit isn't strong enough. The captain can't hold his boys together...

India lost the World Cup for most of these reasons. But there were many others. Indian industry spent crores of rupees on the build up for the World Cup. But members of the Indian team were not given video cassette recorders in their rooms, so that they could watch the performance of the team they were to play the next day. While the South Africans and the Australians were closeted in their hotel rooms every evening minutely studying the field, the strengths and weaknesses of all their competitors, the Indian cricketers were dancing the night away in discos.

Players just couldn't discipline themselves to face matches. Okay, you've had a late night. But if you're fit, the chances are, a good night's sleep will restore some of the damage.

If you *can* sleep. Contravening all rules, many players brought guests to their rooms who slept there sometimes

four or five to a room. If the captain and the managers knew about this, they said nothing. How can anyone who has been up half the night and slept intermittently, ever perform on the field?

These are small things. The bigger things — like the captain's failure and the team's inability to perform — will be discussed by the Board of Cricket

Cricket matches are lost for many reasons. Sometimes they're fixed. Bad weather slows down the pace. The team hasn't worked hard enough and doesn't have back-up logistical support. Team spirit isn't strong enough. The captain can't hold his boys together...

Control in India (BCCI), when it meets next. But the fact is that Indian industry sold the people of India a lemon. They kept advertising India as the winning team. But the Indian team was not committed to winning — and so it couldn't win.

All this makes you wonder whether India has a future in world cricket at all. Take some small but important questions:

- Why did a team, easily the best on paper, not perform?
- What happened in that traumatising last half-hour at Leicester when India lost closely to Zimbabwe. It was that match which sealed our fate.
- Why did the batting collapse once the top three or four batsmen failed?
- Why couldn't the problem of line and length of our bowlers be sorted out even after the team was sent to England a month in advance?

Football and fancyfree

"I don't think I am a very good leader. I don't see a flicker to lead a cricket team" —
 Azharuddin, captain of the India A team to Kenya in 1995

England's leading cricket writer, Geoffrey Boycott, has written a book about the 1995 India A tour to Kenya. It is called 'The India A team to Kenya in 1995'.

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It was at this time that captain skipper Ajay Jadeja did something sensational: he brought himself on to bowl the 47th over. As cricket fans all over the country sat on the edge of their seats, Jadeja went on to perform magic — Robert Croft, Neil Fairbrother and Darren Gough were dismissed in the space of 5 balls. No great bowling, just the right thinking, forcing the batsmen to play the wrong shots. And as those few moments froze and became history, a star was born.

"As a captain, I will be aggressive. That has been the strength in my life. Otherwise, I wouldn't have come this far," remarked Jadeja recently, faced with the prospect of leading the Indian team.

He had been the captain of the India A team, which went to tour Kenya in 1995, so he knows what he's talking about ("...I enjoyed it. It got the best of me in the end," he said at the end of that successful outing).

According to former Indian captain Bishan Singh Bedi, Jadeja "is sharp, a good communicator and has the support of players". But he has his share of detractors who feel "Jadeja" is far too cosmetic and happy-go-lucky to take captaincy seriously.

Even so, there is no denying that he has proven time and



again that he can keep the team morale high and ticking. He has presence of mind, a shrewd cricketing brain and clarity of thought. And a capacity of simply not flagging under pressure. In 1995, at the bi-centennial tournament in New Zealand, in a match against the mighty South Africans, Jadeja was having a tough time playing Pat Symcox. Symcox, realising that he had the batsman well and truly under, handed him a high dosage of sledging to make life even more difficult. Jadeja just smiled back and asked: "What are you doing in the evening?" It was Symcox's turn to be stumped.

Just one example of his never-say-die spirit. •

Shashank Bhatia, Calcutta

These are some of the questions for which Indian cricket-watchers want answers. The philosophising can come later. Why didn't India win?

AZHARUDDIN, WHO IS being squarely blamed for the Indian debacle, is yet to return from England. He reportedly underwent a surgery of the shoulder some time ago. What this has to do with his extended London sojourn is not

known, but he is clearly spending his time profitably: he was spotted shopping at Harrods a few days ago. Not that he was the only one. Several Indian players chose to extend their stay after the tournament was over. They were seen shopping, attending parties and doing just about everything, but mourning.

India takes cricket seriously. So the demand that the captain of the team

explain India's defeat is being voiced in the same breath as the demand that the captain be replaced. Are the two linked?

Even during the tournament, stalwarts like Bishen Singh Bedi and Sunil Gavaskar had criticised Azhar's captaincy. He was considered too laid-back on the field, he did not radiate the confidence a captain should. A leave-them-alone-they-know-their-job policy is fine if you're running a corporation.

One of a kind

"What I want from my colleagues as the captain is 100 per cent commitment. A fierce self-pride — the pride of representing the country... When you are playing for the nation, you should always focus on the game and nothing else" — Sachin Tendulkar, during his one-year-four-month tenure as captain in 1996-97

WHEN SACHIN DEBUTED on 15 November, 1989, at Karachi — all of 16 years and 205 days — not many had reckoned that he would go on to change the face of Indian cricket, indeed world cricket.

Today, after having smashed his way into virtually every record book under the sun, he faces a test of nerves: assuming the mantle of captaincy of a team which has weathered a constant barrage of ups and downs — downs dominating — with remarkable and unashamed indifference.

But Sachin is on familiar ground. In August 1996, captaincy was thrust upon him when the selection committee decided that Azhar was getting a trifle too rusty. At the age of 23, he was the second-youngest Indian captain ever (after M.A.K. Pataudi). Although he showed remarkable fortitude in handling it, inexperience finally got the better of him. What was worse, India's Most Valuable Player suffered at the batting crease.

By the end of '97, statistics showed 27 losses in 48 ODIs (4 were abandoned) and only 3 wins in 14 Tests. The idol was in the danger of being knocked off the pedestal. The media had just about got a whiff of bad blood. But the selectors intervened in time, and reinstated Azhar.

Sachin, though disappointed, took the loss of captaincy in his stride with his characteristic sang-froid. He went back to business: making runs. In spite of a nagging back injury, 1998 saw a veritable deluge of runs from the Little Master and he was back to being numero uno in a way he had never been before.

In early 1999, there was again talk of Sachin being made the captain. But he was adamant in his refusal: "Only after the World Cup can I give it a thought. But as of now, I don't want to take charge of the team."

It was during the World Cup that Tendulkar suffered an agonising personal loss: his father expired. He came back to Bombay for the funeral but flew back in time for a crucial match against Kenya. And as he blasted his way to 140 not out, with the last 40 runs coming off only 17 balls, the entire nation and the cricketing fraternity stood up to salute his brilliance and commitment.

Unfortunately, it was too late. During Sachin's absence, India had lost a vital match against Zimbabwe and that went on to be their undoing at the end of the day. It was the

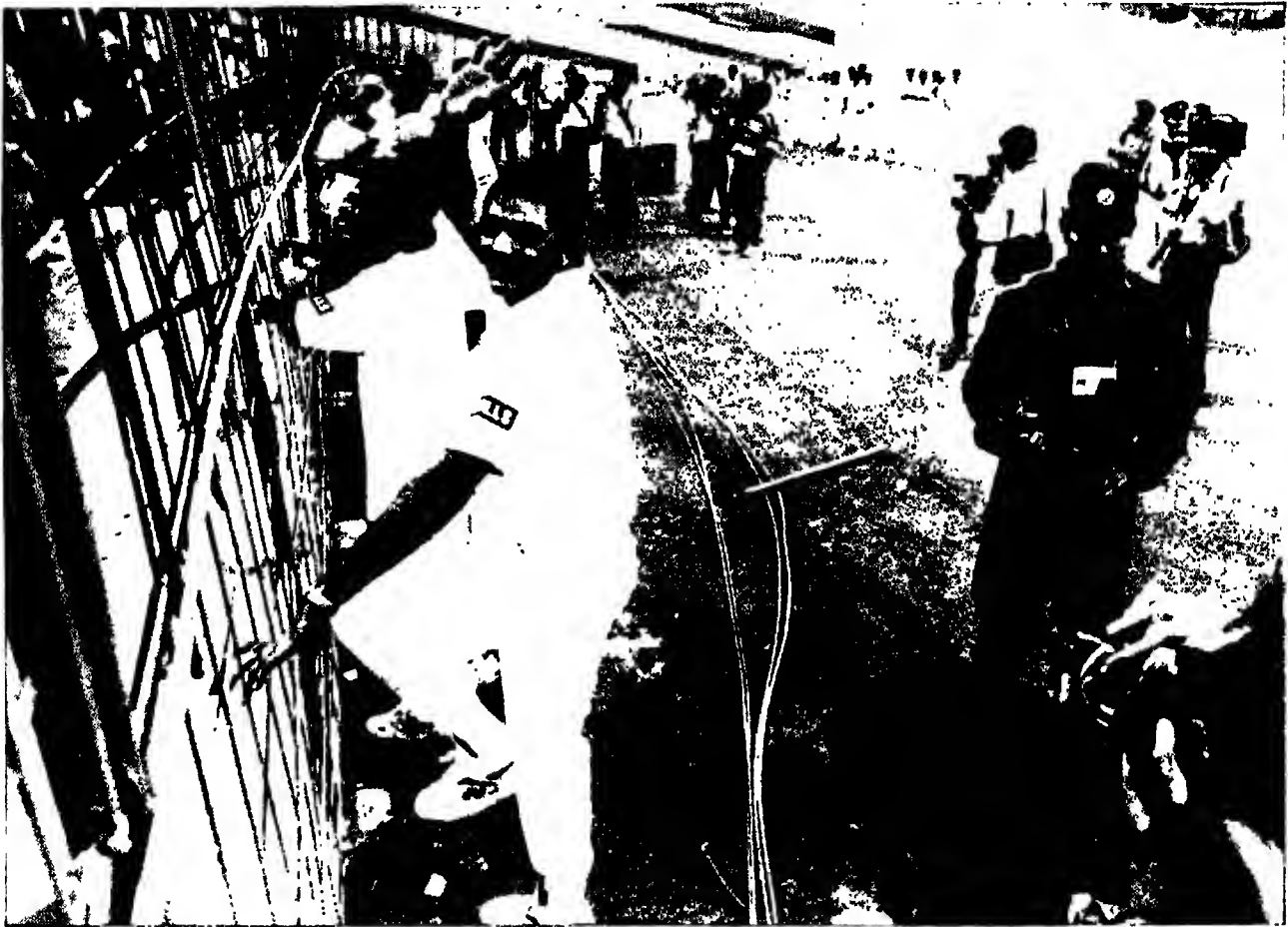
In spite of a nagging back injury, 1998 saw a veritable deluge of runs from the Little Master and he was back to being numero uno in a way he had never been before

last straw when India couldn't even salvage some much-needed pride by losing the inconsequential last Super Six fixture to New Zealand.

In the aftermath of the World Cup, post-mortem reports point heavily towards a vacuum at the top. The need of the hour, feel people who matter, is a dedicated, committed and disciplined captain who will lead by example.

And who better than Sachin — two years older since his last stint, and definitely wiser? •

Sushmita Bose/Calcutta



D P SINHA

But leading a cricket team is a different ballgame altogether.

This message never reached the India skipper.

Okay, assuming that Azhar had his own brand of team management and some other tactical tricks up his sleeve known only to him — well, where were they when the matches were going on?

Azharuddin's un-captain-like qualities were displayed not just on the field but off it as well. All doors to Azhar were shut when the team was not playing cricket. The distance was so much that at times younger players didn't get to see their captain until the next day's practice session. No team dinners, no team entertainment, no informal chats, there was no activity off the field which could keep the team together.

And the last straw was: the artist with the bat failed as well. There is now a definite mood for a change of guard. But the question is: who next?

The choice boils down to three — Sachin Tendulkar, Ajay Jadeja or Anil Kumble. Kumble is a good strategist, a good thinker. But dynamism is the buz-

Azharuddin's un-captain-like qualities were displayed not just on the field but off it as well. All doors to Azhar were shut when the team was not playing cricket. The distance was so much that at times younger players didn't get to see their captain until the next day's practice session

word these days. Moreover, there aren't too many who will speak for Kumble. So unless he makes it by default, the choice is between Sachin and Jadeja.

THE CRACKS IN the team were visible before the World Cup. In fact, talk of appointing a new captain had begun

when the team was being chosen for the World Cup. At that time an offer was made to Sachin Tendulkar, but he had one condition: remove Azhar from the team. However, the selectors and the Board of Cricket Control in India (BCCI) felt at the time that there was no substitute for Azhar in the No. 4 slot and Raj Singh Dungarpur, president of the BCCI, favoured the more experienced Azhar to lead the team. In spite of Jadeja's brilliance as a captain at Sharjah, he was considered a little inexperienced.

Sachin and Jadeja formed one group within the team. The other group was that of Kumble, Srinath and Venkatesh Prasad. With Azhar's *laissez-faire* approach these schisms began to become visible.

What added to the problem was that Brijesh Patel, a cricketer, was sent as the administrative manager of the team for the first time. This led to some obvious differences between him and the coach over cricketing matters. Anshuman Gawkwad, the coach, considered him as interfering in his work.

And as if that was not all, differences

emerged between the physical trainer, Andrew Kokinos, and the team doctor, Dr Ravindra Chaddha. Kokinos has reportedly complained to the Board that Chaddha didn't allow him to enter the field during games and restricted him during the team's training sessions. Chaddha has got his own back. He says Kokinos was responsible in spreading indiscipline among the players by taking them to nightclubs, discotheques, bars, etc.

These schisms did no good to the Indian team. It is not unnatural for differences to emerge among members of the team but in a good team the assumption is that binding forces come out trumps at the end of it all. It is here that a leader counts and it was here that Azhar lost count and India the World Cup. Not only has all this reduced his acceptance among the fans but also among the team members. The team today looks for a motivating skipper who can rejuvenate their sagging morale.

Sachin fits the bill in many ways. He has a nationalist image; those close to him have always considered this as one of his positive qualities. He doesn't like it when his feels he has let India down. His teammates say that he weeps in the dressing room when he doesn't get runs.



Nayan Mongia: He has failed to perform with the bat and it is time a replacement was groomed

Many in the Board believe that his passion for cricket may be just the right dose the Indian cricket team needs.

But then Sachin's conditionalities?

- Remove Azhar from the team
- Bring back Vinod Kamble
- Reconsider Paras Mhambrey, give Kamtkar his due.

The list is not endless but it is not

short either. Indian cricket has suffered enough from regional preferences. This is a trend Tendulkar will have to change. Otherwise clannishness within the teams will only increase. As it is, there exists a Karnataka lobby, a Delhi-Haryana lobby and now a Bengal lobby. This cannot ever send the right message to aspiring cricketers. There are players like Debashish Mohanty who have delivered for India earlier and in the World Cup. Many such lesser-known but talented cricketers are waiting on the sidelines — Jyoti Yadav, M.S.K. Prasad, Gyanendra Pandey, etc.

Some members of the board feel that while Sachin can compromise on these conditions, he will not budge an inch on the condition that Azhar be taken off the team.

Ajit Agarkar: His poor performance in the World Cup could mean the axe may fall on him



IF SACHIN'S CONDITIONS are not met, the obvious choice is Ajay Jadeja. Looked upon as a shrewd captain, Jadeja proved his credentials as a serious contender for the hot seat when he led India to two consecutive victories in Sharjah after the team had lost the first two matches under the captaincy of Azhar. Though he too doesn't favour the inclusion of Azhar as a player, he is expected to be more flexible than Sachin.

It's full circle for the agony king of Indian cricket, Mohammad Azharuddin. A man who made a sensational debut in the 80s, who enthralled millions of cricket fans with his wristy play, whose antics on the field made him the only Indian fielder of international standards... Sadly the same man is today the arbiter of the future of Indian cricket.

His lone supporter, Raj Singh Dungarpur, has reportedly changed his stand on the grounds that Azhar has failed as captain and has to pay. As a batsman, his talent is still recognised. With all the talk of a shoulder surgery, it seems for certain that the decks are being slowly cleared for Sachin's takeover.

But that isn't the only change on the cards. Not many are happy with the present selection committee. With the election of a new Board president slated for August, a new selection committee may also take over. Reportedly, the present chairman of the selection committee, Ajit Wadekar, is far too involved in personal matters and seems unable to give his full attention to cricket.

Apart from these changes, there is talk of getting a new wicket-keeper into the team. Nayan Mongia has failed to perform with the bat and it is time a replacement was groomed. Names like M.S.K. Prasad and Vijay Yadav are doing the rounds. Another option being talked about is to make Rahul Dravid the permanent wicket-keeper of the team. There aren't many takers for this suggestion, however.

Ajit Agarkar's poor performance in the World Cup could mean the axe may fall on him too. But these selections will have to be seen in the context of who the next captain will be. For the moment it seems certain that Azhar is on his way out.

Azhar may not have thought of such an exit. But the time has come for him to hang up his boots and depart with grace. If he doesn't, he might have to fall from grace. •

Pranab Dhal Samanta/New Delhi

Enough is enough

V.P. Singh owes some explanations to the nation



We should demand an apology from former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh for misleading us on the Bofors gun. All kinds of allegations were made

about the pay-off and the performance of the gun. Consequently, the company was blacklisted and banned in the country. The Bofors gun deal snowballed into a major political controversy and in the ensuing election it became the most important issue on which Singh came to power.

The wheel has turned full circle as the BJP government had lifted the ban on Bofors. The gun proved its mettle in the ongoing Operation Vijay against Pakistan intruders in Kargil. The high-calibre gun has proved to be most effective in the inhospitable terrains of Kargil and Siachen.

The howitzer has a long range of up to 42 km and is the only 155-mm artillery gun in the army's inventory. The army has been facing considerable problems in obtaining spares, owing to which it has been forced to cannibalise a number of these guns.

No one was against probing the corruption angle in the Bofors deal, but the way Singh and others including George Fernandes and BJP leaders made allegations about the quality of the gun was not appropriate. Singh had said at a public meeting at Gaya that the Bofors gun instead of killing the enemy backfires on our soldiers because of its poor quality. Now he's keeping quiet over the lifting of the ban on Bofors by the BJP government.

As per the original agreement which was cancelled by Singh, the company was supposed to supply shells at Rs 6,000 each. Now because of the dire need the government is purchasing these for Rs 45,000. The nation is losing heavily thanks to V.P. Singh.

Singh is an irresponsible politician. He can do anything for votes. He talks

loudly about his love for the poor, downtrodden and backward classes, but is still feudal inside. He would never like to be treated by a Dalit or an OBC doctor who has been recruited through reservation. He prefers to be treated by the best doctors of England or America.

At present he is in London undergoing treatment for kidney ailment. His

machine for him at Delhi's Apollo hospital. The doctors and the treatment here are as good as anywhere else. But Singh has his own bizarre reasons for continuing in London.

First he said that the water in Delhi does not suit him as it is contaminated. When the government provided him with a water purifier, came another one



Singh is an irresponsible politician. He can do anything for votes. He talks loudly about his love for the poor, downtrodden and backward classes, but is still feudal inside

family, a personal physician and also an SPG team are with him. While one can understand the presence of his family members and the doctor, what is the need for SPG cover in London? These SPG personnel immediately after their arrival in London have to deposit their arms with the department concerned. Then stay, frequent trips to the country and back are a drain on our national exchequer.

For that matter, even his treatment at government expense in London is questionable. The government had earmarked a separate ward with dialysis

that his haemoglobin level tends to go down when he is in India. This is the maximum any government can provide. If you are not satisfied with it and want more, then you should pay for it from your own pocket.

You may recall, he had even removed the SPG cover to Rajiv Gandhi, a decision which cost his life, in order to bring down the expenditure on VIP security. He had said that the government was spending Rs 1 lakh every month on Rajiv's security. Today, one can ask how much is being spent on V.P. Singh every month. •

Nuclear deterrence

The Bomb and its role in the present conflict



Back in 1985, Mushahid Hussain, now Nawaz Sharif's very personable information minister, and then editor of the Islamabad *Muslim* newspaper, came to Delhi to interview Rajiv Gandhi. Because he was an old friend from my days in Karachi, I spent a little time with Mushahid after the interview. He said he was pleased with the interview but for one answer of Rajiv's. He did not think

Rajiv Gandhi was right in expressing himself so vehemently against the nuclearisation of the subcontinent. If India and Pakistan both had the n-bomb, he said, the asymmetry between the military strength of the two countries would be removed and thus open the way to dialogue, ending half-a-century of doubt, suspicion and hostility between us.

We gave Mushahid what he wanted on 11 May, 1998. And his country gave us what we did not want a few days later. But we were the sole nuclear power on the subcontinent for all of 17 days. K. Subrahmanyam, whose craze for the Bomb resembles M.F. Hussain's (and mine) for Madhuri Dixit, could hardly contain his joy at India having become the n-bomb superpower of his aching dreams. What stopped his cup of joy from running over was that, as on 18 May 1998, when he published his Global Watch column in *The Economic Times*, Pakistan was still to attain n-power status. A Pak bomb to match the Indian bomb was the consummation he ardently desired, for, as he argued, "If both countries become overtly nuclear, the Kashmir issue in all probability will get frozen in favour of the status quo." Some dreams die hard.

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, the father of the Bomb, was quoted the same day in the same paper as saying that Pokhran-II and the nuclearisation of our armed strength would give us the "ability to vacate nuclear threats". Post-Kargil, the Pakistan foreign secretary has not vacated the nuclear threat, he has insidiously raised it. And the Pakistan religious affairs minister, Raja Zafarul Haq, has brought God into the equation. "The use of nuclear weapons," he has informed the Pakistan Senate, "is the right of the country if its security is in jeopardy." As when its Mujahideen are driven back home? However, we did not have to wait a year to hear that threat. It was Vaiko who informed the Lok Sabha the day after Chagai that Qazi Husain Ahmed, the chairman of Pakistan's Senate Foreign Relations Committee (and a more charming gentleman would be hard to find), had answered Dr Kalam thus, "A nuclear-armed Pakistan would deter India from a wider conflict" and, therefore, "let us wage a jihad for Kashmir." The jihad is now upon us.



There were other voices too. Immediately after Pokhran-II, home minister Advani argued for 'hot pursuit' of Pakistani and Pak-backed intruders across the Line of Control. He called this a 'pro-active' policy. When asked what he meant by 'pro-active', the home minister clarified in the Lok Sabha that he meant taking 'pre-emptive action'. We do not know what pre-emptive action the Vajpayee government has taken beyond cornering all the kebabs at the Lahore Fort banquet, but the nation's *jawans* are learning at a horrendous cost in blood and bone of the pre-emptive action taken by Pakistan to

ce and Kargil



unilaterally alter the Line of Control.

Advani, acknowledging that his job was 'internal security', not national security of the other sort, took the argument a mile further. "Pakistan's nuclear policy," he patiently explained to blockheads who had not thought up this one on their own, "is India-specific. It is directed towards India and that too is Jammu Kashmir-specific." And here was I, silly old me, thinking Pakistan's nuclear policy was directed at Burkina Faso and, like Advani's nuclear policy, Jayalalitha-specific. Yes, indeed, all Pakistan policy is India-specific 'and that too'

Jammu Kashmir-specific. So, how does the home minister's Bomb help him cross the LoC in 'hot pursuit' — and 'pro-actively' at that? If anyone has come across the LoC it is the Pakis. And our Bomb notwithstanding, we have already lost 150 of the flowers of our youth giving the Pakis a hopelessly reactive response, where five minutes of pro-activism back in April could have saved us hundreds of precious lives.

And, of course, Advani also said, echoing his Cabinet colleague Madan Lal Khurana's more robust language, that the "geo-political situation changed in India's favour after the 11th of May". Go tell that, Advaniji, on the mountains. The geo-political situation in Kargil has changed so much in our favour since the 11th of May that along a line extending some 108 km the enemy has made incursions up to a depth of 8 km: some 800 square kilometres of India went into the enemy's hands because the 'geo-political situation changed in India's favour'! The 'fourth war', which Khurana had called for from his wrestling ring, is now upon us.

Abdul Kalam had said that Pokhran-II would give us the "ability to vacate nuclear threats"

Jagmohan, then a humble backbencher, but with the impressive credentials of having emptied the Vale of Kashmir of its Hindus, justified the Bomb as follows: "We do not want the spirit of Munich to visit us and we do not want the spirit of Pearl Harbour to visit us." If the Lahore Declaration has not proved in retrospect to be exactly as much an assurance of 'peace in our time' as Chamberlain promised waving the piece of paper he had brought back from his encounter with Hitler in Munich, we are certainly entitled to ask where Jagmohan picked up his history. And if Kargil did not take the Vajpayee government just as unawares as the Japanese did in taking out the American fleet at Pearl Harbour, Jagmohanji had perhaps best explain what his reading is of the expression, 'being caught with one's pants down'.

Jagmohan added that before we got the Bomb "we were incapable of doing anything and anybody can come and turn around us" (his English, not mine). Who, one wants to know, has come into Kargil and turned around us? The Congress, and other pusillanimous predecessors of the brave Vajpayee, had failed to explode the Bomb, Jagmohan stressed, not because they could not have done so but because "the level of courage and the level of commitment" of Vir Vajpayee "was not forthcoming". It took less than a year from then for Pak-



L.K. ADVANI: immediately after Pokhran-II the home minister argued for 'hot pursuit' of Pakistani intruders across the Line of Control



P. CHIDAMBARAM: he zeroed in on the real reason for the Bomb — "to satisfy the vanity of a political party"

backed Mujahideen and Pakistani regulars to reach the 'level of courage and commitment' they are displaying in Kargil. That is the outcome of the dauntless BJP taking upon itself to make India, first, and then Pakistan, overt nuclear weapon powers.

Govindacharya's pious pronouncements at least had the merit of being sincere and truthful. Justifying Pokhran-II, he said, "Like Ayodhya, the nuclear tests are an emotional nationalist assertion." In short, that when it comes to the next *masjid*, we'll nuke it. Quite on par with Kushabhau Thakre's deeply moving proposal that at the site of the blast there should be built a *Shakti Peeth* so that Pokhran becomes a kind of Hindu Mecca/Medina, the goal of a 'religious pilgrimage'

Our media was not behindhand in singing hosannas in praise of our blasting the Bomb. For Shekhar Gupta of *The Indian Express*, "This is the end of ambiguity and hypocrisy. this is a time for popular euphoria and celebration." The fire-crackers, Shekhar, are bursting all over the Himalayas. *The Pioneer* editor Chandan Mitra was, of course, bang on with his brand of hyperbole. "India has arrived," quoth he, "on the threshold of superpower status." Vajpayee should send Chandan, like he did *The Observer's* R.K. Mishra, on a secret mission to G-8. Somebody has forgotten to tell them to invite superpower India. *The Statesman*, perhaps the Oracle himself, C.R. Irani, in a moment of absent-minded anonymity, weighed in with this: "Governments [in India] have traditionally made a mess of national security and strategic questions by falling between the two stools of 'peaceniks' and power-play." Which stool, dare one ask, is being clambered on from

Drass to Batalik?

The Tribune of Chandigarh said we could now "shed the nuclear fear caused in fainthearts by the bullying US-Pakistani-China nexus". Ever since Pokhran-II, our nuclear bravehearts have assiduously wooed the US as the US has never before been wooed by any self-respecting Indian government. And to rein in the Pakistanis, the bomb-empowered Vajpayee government has gone so far as to assure the startled Chinese, through Jaswant Singh in Beijing, that there is no threat at all, whatever George might say, none whatsoever, from China. No more nexus, only plexus.

The Hindustan Times found justification in the Bomb because "benign pacifism is not only unfeasible but may even send the wrong message of weakness to countries which have not shown any sign of wanting to live in friendship." So, we got our Bomb; the Pakis were intimidated into inviting us to Lahore; and while we feasted at the Fort the Mujahideen and Pak regulars were readying themselves to launch the most blatant military invasion of our land in a generation. "The bomb," went on *The HT* editorial, "is not a weapon of war. Its purpose is deterrence." Who has been deterred in Kargil?

It was only *The Economic Times* that got it right: "India's strategic position hasn't improved, and may just have deteriorated... No longer can India beat Pakistan."

The one voice that in the aftermath of Pokhran-II truly spoke the language of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru was P. Chidambaram's. Though no longer of the Congress, Chidambaram warned, "You have made both your major neighbours sworn enemies as a result of what you did." He drew the single



GEORGE FERNANDES: the only real invasion has been in the Kargil sector, of which the *Raksha Mantri* was in blissful ignorance

The nuclearisation of India and Pakistan has not led to friendship. It has led to Kargil through the deception of Lahore

most important distinction between Pokhran-I and Pokhran-II: "When Shrimati Indira Gandhi tested it, she did not utter a word about weaponisation. You tested it and before the mushroom clouds died down, your ministers were talking about weaponisation, about mounting warheads on missiles, about an unfinished agenda, about hot pursuits and about a fourth war." All that has come to pass — from weaponisation with n-bombs to the fourth war. And all in just a passing 12 months. Chidambaram reminded the House that "the last war with China was fought 36 years ago. The last war with Pakistan was fought 27 years ago". It has taken just 13 months from Pokhran-II to a 'war-like situation'. Meanwhile, George's discoveries — the Chinese helipad in Arunachal Pradesh, the Chinese road on our side of the Line of Actual Control, the Chinese naval base in the Coco islands — have all proved a chimera of George's wild imagination. The only real invasion has been in the Kargil sector — of which, insists his party general secretary, the *Raksha Mantri* was in blissful ignorance.



JAGMOHAN: the Congress, he stressed, had failed to explode the Bomb, because "the level of courage and commitment" of Vir Vajpayee "was not forthcoming"

Chidambaram zeroed in on the real reason for the Bomb: "to satisfy the vanity of a political party". Calling on the country to "abjure n-weapons," Chidambaram said, "We are opposed to weaponisation; we are opposed to building a nuclear arsenal; and we are opposed to taking India into an arms race." To "acquire a whole arsenal of nuclear weapons," concluded Chidambaram, "cuts at the root of our commitment to a nuclear-weapon free world." Attaboy, Chidambaram. Absolutely, one hundred per cent right. I pay him the highest compliment I can: Mani-Talk could not have put it better!

Unfortunately, 1998-99 has not been a good year for sane voices. The nuclearisation of India and Pakistan has not led to friendship. It has led to Kargil through the deception of Lahore. It has led to the world powers smacking their lips in anticipation of getting their hands back, at long last, on Kashmir. It has weakened us diplomatically, dramatically eroding our independence, and curtailing the one thing we could have done if we had not burdened ourselves with the Bomb: crossed into Pakistan and hit them where it hurts, as we did in 1965 in Sialkot and Lahore after Operation Gibraltar. We could do that because Lal Bahadur Shastri did not have the Bomb. Nor did Ayub Khan. Now, Vajpayee has his Bomb. And so does Nawaz Sharif have 'a few troublesome toys' as H.Y. Sharada Prasad has devastatingly put it. Which is why, inhibited militarily by our mutual possession of the Bomb, our boys — Indian and Pakistani — are dying by the hundreds on the snow-covered slopes of the Himalayas, lengthening indefinitely a military conflict that could have been shortened but for Pokhran and Chagai. The tragedy that has already overtaken us could presage a much bigger disaster. •

He's Back!



Laloo launches the RJD's election campaign at a national convention in Patna

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee started it. But it was Rashtriya Janata Dal boss Laloo Prasad Yadav who liked the idea and turned it to advantage. Close on the heels of the BJP-organised Rashtra Raksha Rally on 25 June at Patna, the RJD chief called for a two-day convention in the state capital. The second national convention packed a lot of meaning. It flagged off his party's election campaign. But the real motive was to get rid of the 'untouchable' image he has acquired of late.

Among the *dramatis personae* at the convention were CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan and CPI(M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet. Not present though was former Janata Dal chief S.R. Bommar who stayed away.

Also absent was Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Samajwadi Party president. Insiders say Mulayam Singh had a good excuse not to attend: he was busy with

his rally in Rae Bareilly. The real reason may have been something else. It would have been embarrassing for Mulayam, who's joining up with Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar, to be present at the rally, Laloo being in tandem with Sonia Gandhi.

As far as the Left parties are concerned, you need to step back a bit. Two years ago, the Left had snapped relations with Laloo after he was accused in the multi-crore fodder scam. Now, after two years, Laloo Yadav has once again emerged as one of the important constituents of Third Front politics. And though the corruption charges against Laloo still remain, the Left, without much of a vote base, has chosen to ride piggyback on the RJD.

Formed in 1996, the RJD's major handicap has been that it could not register its presence outside Bihar. This is despite the fact that the RJD has functioning offices in as many as 24 states. The invi-

tation to Bommar was a step towards increasing the RJD's influence and, at the same time, belittling JD leaders like Ram Vilas Paswan and eroding their vote-bank. With the national working committee meet on 4 July followed by the "open national convention" the following day, it was the charge of the 'Lantern Brigade'.

Riding a *rath*, Laloo and his entourage arrived at the historic Gandhi Maidan in the afternoon. The horse-drawn chariot was parked in the VIP enclosure for the Rajah of Bihar to ride home. Accompanying him was the turncoat from the Samata Party, Shivanand Tiwary, who is now the RJD spokesman.

Also on the card was the politicisation of the Kargil conflict. The crisis, bellowed Laloo, was the outcome of the Union government's failure. Since Vajpayee and his defence minister George Fernandes were coming out with misleading statements, cases under the anti-national

Laloo Yadav speaking at the rally

act should be lodged against them, he said. The demagogue was, as usual, in his elements.

He wouldn't speak about elections. "It is already over. All the parties opposed to us are nowhere in sight," he said. "We have the country before us. America is abetting the conflict initiated by Pakistan in Kargil." Chief minister Rabri Devi graced the occasion but as a leader who spoke only to enlighten the gathering on how the government was taking care of the martyrs' families. She chose to listen rather than speak.

CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan said that the real danger was from the BJP and its allies. "The Kargil conflict has proved that these parties are incompetent in defending the borders," he said. He then moved on to the Left's favourite area: economics and liberalisation, exhorting the masses to agitate against the GATT and the patent Bill.

H.S. Surjeet insisted that the government should call for a special Rajya

Sabha session. Accusing the Vajpayee government of inept handling of the situation, he said that to defeat the BJP-Samata Party combine, "We should keep aside old differences."

If Laloo Yadav had wanted to convey the message to the masses that the Left parties are at his beck and call, he has certainly succeeded. Definitely, 5 July was Laloo's day. He succeeded in making Shakuni Choudhary switch loyalties. The ex-Samata Party MP from the Khagaria parliamentary constituency formally joined the RJD on that day. His wife Parvati Devi, an MLA from the Tarapur Assembly segment, is already in the RJD. Interestingly, Choudhary's son, considered a 'minor', is a Cabinet minister in the Rabri Devi government even though he is neither an MLA nor an MLC.

Handing over a lantern, Laloo Yadav said that Shakuni Choudhary's inclusion in the RJD is a major setback to feudal forces. There was a time when Laloo used to routinely abuse Choudhary. Now, of course, it was different.

Choudhary entertained the crowd by

ridiculing Union railway minister Nitish Kumar. "He is nothing compared to Lalooji," he said. Taking a pot-shot at George Fernandes, Choudhary said that the Samata Party would be marginalised as the Nalanda Samata Party.

It was not only the Samata Party that seemed to be the loser. Having reached Patna as the representative of the JD, national general secretary Wasim Ahmad ended up by joining the RJD. Before Laloo announced that Ahmad had joined the RJD, he made fun of the Janata Dal. "There is no *janta* there; all have become leaders who fight over the issue of coming to Patna to attend the convention," he jibed.

For Laloo, whose image has suffered after being charged by the CBI in the fodder scam, the convention was the opening step towards the electoral battle ahead. It's going to be one hell of a close fight because the BJP-Samata Party combine is also sharpening its knives for the coming conflict. But then that's politics and Laloo, if nothing else, is a tough, resilient man. •

Naved Zahir/Patna

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Arjun Singh decides not to contest the Lok Sabha polls. What will be his next move?

After the announcement of the Lok Sabha polls one question which has been repeatedly asked in press conferences of the Madhya Pradesh chief minister and the Pradesh Congress Committee president was whether Arjun Singh would contest this time.

Last fortnight Singh himself cleared the smoke. "I won't contest the coming Lok Sabha polls and devote all my time and energy to realise our overriding objective to lead the Congress party to a resounding victory under the leadership of Mrs Sonia Gandhi." He stunned both his supporters and opponents.

What will be his next move? Will he go for a Rajya Sabha seat as two successive defeats from Satna and Hoshanga-

"I won't contest the coming Lok Sabha polls and devote all my time and energy to realise our overriding objective to lead the Congress party to a resounding victory under the leadership of Mrs Sonia Gandhi," Arjun announced

bad have made him afraid of contesting an election? Or is it the end of his political career?

Some political observers call it an interval in electoral politics. Some say it is showing his back to the battlefield. In fact, Singh's supporters had been looking for a safe constituency for quite some time. Among others they assessed Bhopal also. But the leader was not confident.

Congress sources point out that "winn-

HORS DE COMBAT



ing or losing for Arjun Singh also depended a lot on chief minister Digvijay Singh, but the former has lost faith in the latter". Incidentally, just two days before Arjun's announcement, the chief minister had announced that the former would contest from Satna and "will win".

Sources close to Arjun say that there was pressure from his family not to contest the elections because of his health. But there might have been other reasons, too. Singh himself had floated the idea that those who failed twice in Vidhan Sabha elections should not be given tickets. He might have become a victim of his own idea.

His political opponents in Delhi cite the possibility of not getting a ticket as the reason for his opting out. Not finding a safe constituency was also one of the major reasons. Arjun Singh says he had informed Sonia Gandhi prior to his announcement.

Former deputy chief minister Subhash Yadav, an old supporter of Singh, termed it as a good gesture. "He will be a great campaigner for the party," Yadav remarked.

The decision has brought into focus Arjun's style of politics. He has never been a mass leader as he has made people believe, political analysts say. He has been a master manipulator, a shrewd politician with a mask of politeness and courtesy.

In state politics, the Shukla brothers — Shyama Charan and Vidya Charan — were his main rivals. He finished them both politically. He won over all the supporters of the duo in the Chhattisgarh region by different methods. "He has a price for everyone," comments an old associate of Arjun Singh.

During his tenure as chief minister from 1980-85, his Cabinet consisted of people who at one time or the other had been Shukla supporters. In fact in 1980, tribal leader Shiv Bhanu Singh Solanki won the Congress legislature party election (he himself was a Shukla supporter) but Arjun Singh manipulated his way to become the chief minister.

But Singh made a great blunder in 1995 by joining the Congress(T). It was a disaster. Not only did he lose from Satna but his party's performance was miserable. His supporters deserted him. Digvijay Singh filled the vacuum. He cut his one-time mentor down to size in state politics.

This is not for the first time that Arjun Singh is facing a crisis. But his open

loyalty to the Gandhi family has always rescued him. He rose to his present position because of this reason. It may be a different matter whether the loyalty is for achieving his own political goals. Apparently, Sharad Pawar and Purno Sangma left the Congress because of him.

The Rajya Sabha elections are due in MP next April. There will be six seats, four for the Congress and two for the Bharatiya Janata Party. The terms of

whether he would like to go to the Rajya Sabha. "It is not in my hands, the Congress party will decide." He is right. It will depend a lot on Digvijay Singh, who will lead the party in the coming Lok Sabha elections. Indeed, the party lost two Lok Sabha polls under his leadership. But it is also a fact that he led the party to victory in two Vidhan Sabha elections.

Says Digvijay, "They [people like Arjun Singh] are thinkers of the party. We will have him in the Rajya Sabha. I



"They [people like Arjun Singh] are thinkers of the party. We will have him in the Rajya Sabha. I have talked to Madam [Sonia Gandhi] over the issue," says Digvijay

Gufran-E-Azam, Radha Kishan Malviya, present PCC chief Vina Verma and Hansraj Bharadwaj are due to expire in April. Besides, Govind Miri and Raghavji will also retire. So the options are still open.

However, Arjun Singh did not say

have talked to Madam [Sonia Gandhi] over the issue."

Today Arjun Singh has more enemies than friends and well-wishers, within the party. At a recent meeting of the Congress election committee in Bhopal, a member welcomed the idea of Singh not contesting the election. He remarked, "We should also have some expiry date in politics like we have in medicines." The message was clear. And there were not many who opposed him.

But saying that Arjun Singh is finished politically means one doesn't understand him, says a Congressman. "Remember, when he was asked to contest from the Delhi South Lok Sabha seat, people said he was finished, but he won."

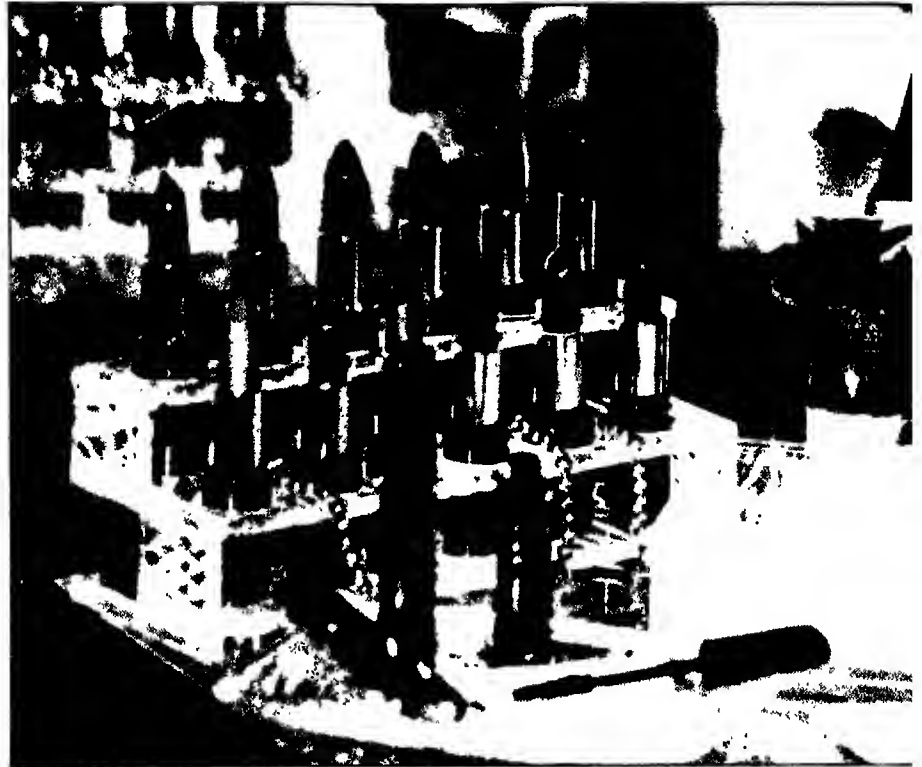
"So many people have written him off so many times. But he is a shrewd and astute politician. He has bounced back every time," he adds. •

Deshdeep Saxena/Bhopal

THE DIRECT



Can door-to-door salesmen give retailers a run for their money?



The Oriflame range of products: the company does not believe in soliciting customers near retailer shops

The phone rings in your home. "Hi. This is Dr Swapan Mukherjee here. Remember me? I met you on the train? Are you free today? Can I come over for a while? Actually I am an Amway distributor..."

That is how it begins. Direct selling is no longer the prerogative of the good old *sabziwallah* or the neighbourhood *dhobi*. Multinationals have made a success of it, and now Indian corporates too are eyeing the pie. But the question is how big is the pie? Can direct sellers give retailers a run for their money?

Says Pradeep Mathur, managing director, Tupperware India: "In the case of direct selling, it will take a long time to accept and build the same relationship because we have to first build the channels." Nevertheless, the Indian market in recent times has lured the prominent direct selling giants to expand and reap profits here.

Over the past five years the industry has offered 3,58,000 income opportunities in India. Says Stephen Beddoe, GM, Distribution Relations and Marketing, Amway India: "Direct selling is very

entrepreneurial and I don't know any people in the world who are more entrepreneurial than Indians. Having one's own business, seeking out opportunities and family networking are in the Indian blood. And they are all part of our multi-level marketing approach."

We are flattered. Thank you. But how do the enterprising distributor, the discerning consumer and the economy in general stand to gain? Here's how:

- The direct sellers get an attractive income opportunity. In 1998, direct sellers in India earned approximately Rs 100 crore. Since this opportunity comes without a necessarily large financial investment in inventories or infrastructure, it is all the more lucrative. Besides, sales persons are given invaluable training, free of cost.

- The consumer gets an opportunity to understand the features and benefits of the products by informative demonstrations within their homes.

- Consumers are also assured of

refund policies in case they are not satisfied. They can refer to an independent ombudsman appointed by the Indian Direct Selling Association, a member of the World Direct Selling Association, headquartered in Washington.

So far so good. But then, direct selling was banned in China recently. In India, the commerce ministry was allegedly caught on the wrong foot over certain adverse reports on the industry in the foreign media. Allegations levelled at the multinationals were insignificant fund infusion, and low employment generation. Government sources also allege that none of the players have turned India into a major manufacturing base.

The companies dismissed the reports as baseless. Says Koyaljeet Kaur Hanjra, executive manager, IDSA: "We have not received any official intimation from any ministry. We have just read reports in newspapers." However, proposals from new direct marketing entr-

APPROACH



Women recruited in direct selling over the last five years:

AMWAY ENTERPRISES: 1,50,000
AVON INDIA: 39,000
ORIFLAME INDIA: 1,03,000
TUPPERWARE INDIA: 15,000

tions we're back in business there," asserts Gosling. All the same new regulations are being promulgated in China. In India too, the companies themselves have suggested some regulatory mechanisms that already exist in western countries to guide the operations here.

"But pyramid marketing should not be permitted," asserts Lajinder Singh Bawa, CEO, Oriflame India. Explains Amit Chaudhary, manager, Corporate Communications, Amway India: "Pyramid selling offers get-rich-quick schemes to induce people to buy ground floor or leadership positions. In pyramid selling there is no viable long term opportunity." Numerous legislators around the globe have prescribed pyramid selling. The scheme essentially involves an internal redistribution of wealth from new entrants to promoters. The scheme serves no legitimate commercial function as products have no real market value. These are certificates, spurious training programmes, magazine subscriptions and illusory discounts. Because pyramids are structured like legitimate multi-level companies, people often confuse the two and seek to prohibit the legitimate companies.

The hallmarks of direct selling, irrespective of single level or multiple-level marketing are equal opportunity and earnings varying directly with efforts put in.

But how does the first-time consumer perceive this approach? Says Soma Datta Sarkar, an NRI from US: "It is quite irritating at times when we are stopped at the mall for a sale by an Indian and they immediately reveal their intention after exchanging pleasantries. They are regulars and we simply avoid them." What seems an innovative approach often makes the distributor an object of ridi-

cule. In India one comes across them near the retailer shops, the last place where they should be spotted trying to woo customers. Says Bawa: "We shall disqualify such distributors as our approach is entirely different."

And does this approach succeed in ensuring consumer satisfaction? While the code of ethics boasts of money back guarantees, the consumer is seldom aware of his rights. Says Pratima Das, a dissatisfied consumer: "I am not satisfied with the basket of Modicare products that I purchased recently. This is the last time I'll buy from my friend." When informed of her right to a refund, she wasn't too sure if she would return the product as it would upset her friend. With personal obligations to friends being the basis of this trade, can the market get saturated? Disagrees Bawa: "We expect to grow five-fold in the next three years." Explains Koyaljeet Kaur: "While it is true that transactions with friends are often one-time purchases, there is ample opportunity for growth through introducing fresh recruits. And new entrants can be easily accommodated."

The latest entrant, Sunrider International, despite initial bureaucratic hurdles, is committed to the Indian market. Says Gurdeep Singh, country manager, Sunrider: "We are confident that the unique features of our product will appeal to all."

Direct selling is undoubtedly innovative. Direct sellers are not transferring mechanically from factories to shelves. Even Hindustan Lever Limited, the undisputed monarch of India's retail shelves, has bitten the bait of this enticing deal. Aviance, their range of premium products, will not rely on 30-second spots on TV. Having a beauty advisor offering solutions to customers—that's the way to move a consumer. And so it is the consumer who wins again.

For the moment it is a win-win situation for all. But the success of direct sales will depend, crucially, on the product's quality and the service offered. That is how the *sabziwallah* and the *dhobi* survived. The point is can our modern day direct sellers do the same? •

Devdatta Das/New Delhi

ants have been put on hold for the time being.

At what level? Says Ajit Kumar, industries secretary, reassuringly: "At the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) we're not exactly examining the system through which marketing takes place. They must meet the policy guidelines for FDI. How they market their product is not our concern." In other words, if direct marketing majors want to invest in India, they won't be prevented from doing so, if they meet all the other investment conditions.

That vindicates the direct sellers' claim. Adds David Gosling, MD, Avon: "We abide by all the local laws pertaining to excise, packaging and other details. They are incorporated in our self-regulatory code of ethics documented by the IDSA." And the code of ethics doesn't advocate pyramid marketing that irked the authorities in China.

Fraudulent pyramid marketing practices by fictitious firms, selling funeral plots, was exposed as a major direct selling scandal in China. "But after negotia-

Battle on the box

Banning Pak TV will not necessarily deter Indians from watching it



We are almost a month into the Kargil operations and TV is catching up slowly. It started with news items, interviews, panel discussions and Pramod Mahajan's master-stroke: banning Pak TV. Of the lot, the banning seems to have been the least intelligent because the people of Kashmir and Punjab get Pak TV quite easily,

their own dishes and do not need cable operators can still get PTV, but seldom watch. So Mr Mahajan should get to work on more powerful transmitters and better programmes from Doordarshan.

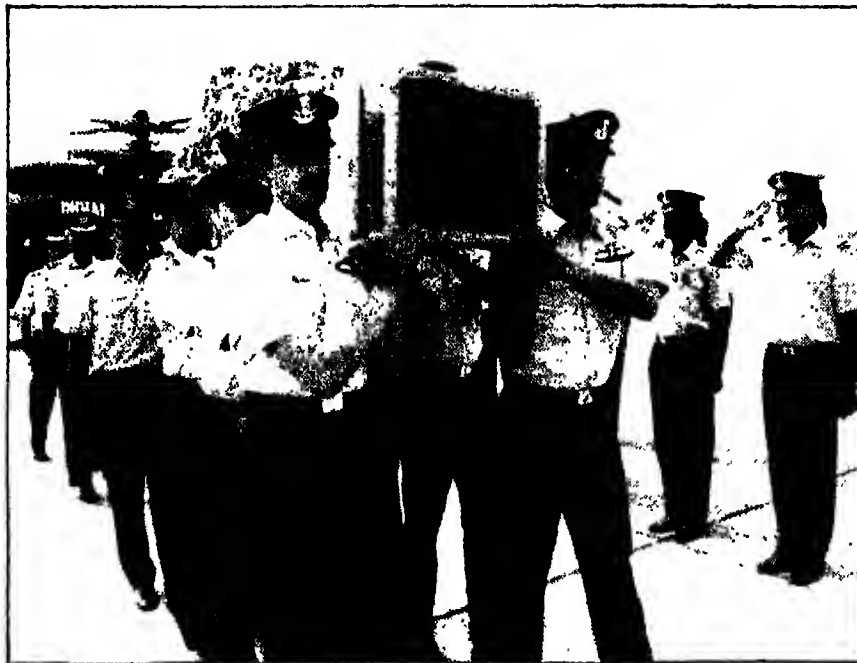
Our war correspondents include Barkha Dutt, whose mother, the late Prabha Dutt, was India's first woman war correspondent. Our young print and media correspondents are high up there and doing as much lively reporting as the Army permits. It is, however, the panel discussions that bother me. Yes, we are an open society but when Srinivasan

more resources and amenities still grossly inadequate. Sam Bahadur Manekshaw and Kapil Dev comforting the wounded. Indelible pictures that can never fade.

The other, happier, war was at Wimbledon. And India won the men's doubles and Leander Paes also the mixed doubles, the same day. But viewers were far from happy. Once again, DD got the monopoly, quarter-finals onwards, purely through its membership of the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, and elbowed out the far more professional and competent STAR Sports, including Vijay Amritraj. DD does not have a full-time sports channel and one has to do the usual hop, skip and jump between two channels — bad colour, the sound going off, sometimes flickering images et al. Worst of all, DD did not show the men's doubles final which was of far more interest to India than the women's singles. To add insult to injury, they did not even show the recording the same evening. Just flashing the congratulatory sign was poor compensation.

To cut a long story short, DD has neither the resources, nor the programme sense to manage international sports events of this level. It has used its bureaucratic power because it has neither the guts, nor the skills to face international competition and made a sorry mess of things. If it has any sense, it should cover such events only for those who do not have cable connections and stick to its terrestrial beat. But those who can afford cable will no longer put up with DD's incompetence and arrogance. A spot of competition, which has been the main gain from the satellite invasion, will teach DD how to behave and do justice to the long-suffering viewer.

All said and done, DD remains, and is likely to remain, a *sarkari* medium — a process Pramod Mahajan has hastened by saying that is exactly what he wants it to be. The Prasar Bharati members on the other hand are either disinterested or realise that they have been defeated. Because they have come to the conclusion that they are powerless and that Shastri Bhawan reigns supreme. •



direct, without the help of cable operators. And when DD's programmes cross the hills by low-powered transmitters (a strange excuse in these days of high-tech), they appear so dull in the vital border areas that north India laps up Pakistan's TV on common middle-class themes and the north-east thrives on Indonesia's American films, international sports relays, such as the football World Cup. The Western music-loving north-east laps up choral music from China. Most Indians, who are pretty canny, politically, find PTV's news bulletins laughable. Many people who own

The funeral of a dead soldier conducted with top military honours

Jain asked General Karim what our next strategy would be, he naturally ducked. They are watching us in Pakistan and what do you expect? Top Army secrets?

Most moving of all are the human interest stories. The solemn funerals with top military honours, from Manipur to Kerala, the brave parents, brothers and sisters, proud in their grief. The shots of our officers and *jawans* in hospitals with mutilated limbs. The wife of the army chief, herself a doctor, pleading for

WEST BENGAL

Reverse gear

The state government does a volte-face on introducing Euro emission norms

PHACIP BANYAL



FIRE AND SMOKE: a polluting vehicle on Calcutta's streets

Can the Red ever see green? The recent volte-face by the West Bengal government on introducing Euro emission norms for Calcutta's vehicles has exposed the colour blindness of the state's Left Front rulers. Taking the cue from Delhi's decision to introduce the Euro-I and Euro-II norms, West Bengal environment minister Manab Mukherjee had also announced a 'package of environment policies' on the eve of the last environment day. However, faced with protests from within and outside the government, Mukherjee had to place the matter before a committee — an official excuse for putting an initiative on hold.

In tune with the Supreme Court directive on air pollution in Delhi, Mukherjee had announced that from 1 July, 1999, no new private vehicle (both petrol and diesel versions) would be registered within the Calcutta Metropolitan Area (CMA) unless it conformed to the Euro-I mass emission standard. From 1 April 2000, the norms were to be further tightened to include the Euro-II standard.

He had also proclaimed that from 1 January 2000, taxis which were more than 15 years of age would have to be replaced as per West Bengal Motor Vehicles Act 1989. Come 15 August and Mukherjee's hit list was to include commercial vehicles like buses, trucks, vans and others. Announcing these measures, Mukherjee observed that he had to take this

unpopular decision because the state government had no other way to curb the ever-increasing vehicular pollution in the city.

Mukherjee's intentions were laudable no doubt. But the moment these measures were announced, his package came unstuck. Not only 'the package' caused uproars in the state's transport sector, it also caused quite a few heartburns in the government. In fact, during the official environment day programme, state finance minister Asim Dasgupta sounded sceptical about the 'fragmented environment policy' which involved getting rid of over-aged taxis.

He felt that an environment policy should have a wider and more comprehensive perspective. Dasgupta even suggested that the "BBD Bag area could be made free from private cars and only buses and taxis be allowed there". CPI(M) heavyweights like Tarit Topdar and PWD minister Khsiti Goswami (of the RSP) were quite categorical in expressing dissent. Goswami went on to observe: "There is no Cabinet policy on environment".

Leaders of taxi-owners' unions demanded subsidy from the state government to enable them to buy new vehicles "which will cost more". However, P. Bandopadhyay of the R&D division of Hindustan Motors — the company holding a virtual monopoly over the city's taxi market — did not agree

with this contention. "The 1.5 litre and 2 litre diesel-run Ambassador cars have been Euro-I compliant for more than a year. We will not charge any extra money now," Bando-padhyay told SUNDAY.

Moreover, observations made by the Calcutta Police seemed to vindicate the government decision to impose the Euro emission norms. Speaking to SUNDAY, Police Commissioner Dinesh Vajpayee pointed out that during the last four years, half the taxis plying on the streets of Calcutta were found to be offenders so far as emission norms were concerned.

Private transport operators were not the only ones at the receiving end. The new directive also meant a lot of worry for a prominent car maker like the Maruti Udyog Limited (MUL). MUL was in trouble because it had not become Euro compliant. Earlier, MUL managing director R.S.S.L.N. Bhaskaruddu had met chief minister Jyoti Basu and requested him for three months' time to make his cars Euro-I compliant. M.D. Jindal, one of the leading MUL dealers, felt that the Calcutta market was unlikely to be hijacked by other car manufacturers. He was hopeful that the state government would bail them out.

As it turned out, Jindal's hope was not misplaced. Buckling under pressure, the state government decided that the interests of a few taxi and bus owners and union leaders were more important than clean air for the entire city. Accordingly, it announced that the 'package of decisions' will not be enforced right now. The state government also set up a committee comprising members from the pollution control board, the state environment and police departments and representatives from transport operators' unions who will now deliberate on the new set of rules and take appropriate decisions.

But the story does not end here. Though the transport minister has assured that no decision, which will adversely affect people, will be taken, the environment minister has ruled out any possibility of a dilution of his environment policy.

Senior officials, meanwhile, are apprehensive of implementing such crucial decision—involving so many factors—in a hurry. As it stands, Calcutta's environment initiative has come to a dead stop because the Red has failed to turn green. •
Jayanta Basu/Calcutta

BIHAR

Bizarre business

A sack containing 80 skulls are found in Patna station

The ticket collector (TC) at the Patna railway station, Janardhan Toppo, was on routine duty at Platform No. 1. He asked for ticket from a man carrying a sack. The man did not have one and Toppo demanded that he pay the requisite fine. The man handed the sack to the TC and said he was going to get the money. But he never returned. It was only after an hour that Toppo lugged the bag to his office. When the sack was opened, a horrible stench filled the room. There were 80 human skulls inside.

Four of these came from children. The GRP was called who lodged a case. With the man vanishing into thin air, the cops



GORY SIGHT: file picture of skulls found by the police at Phalgu

are now trying to locate the train on which the man with his sack travelled. The man's identity also remains a mystery.

Similar incidents have taken place in Bihar before. In 1968, a skeleton, packed in a wooden crate waiting to be parcelled, was recovered by the Dhanbad police. Later, it was found that

It's showtime, folks

People of Bhutan take to television in a big way

The tiny, isolated kingdom of Bhutan, nestling in the middle of the mighty Himalayas, has decided to open its doors to the outside world. On the 25th anniversary of his coronation, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk has decided to step up his modernisation drive and end his country's self-imposed isolation by giving television and the internet a royal welcome. From now on, television dishes need not be kept under wraps and MTV need not be a taboo in Bhutan. Responding to this new-found openness, the people have taken to television in a big way.

But the Himalayan kingdom's reform process was started way back in the Fifties. It was the late Jigme Dorji Wangchuk—father of the present monarch—who took the initial steps in this direction. Educated in India and England, King Jigme Dorji constituted the National Assembly in 1953 and also abolished serfdom in 1956. At the same time, as he led Bhutan into the modern world, he emphasised the need to preserve Bhutanese culture and traditions.

It would be wrong to say that television did not exist in

the skeleton came from the local Ranga Tand graveyard.

In 1975, the Dhanbad police detected the racket. This time, two skeletons were found packed in a wooden crate, all set to be parcelled to Calcutta. The police found out that a man called Singhi used to take out the bodies from the graves. Using acids and other chemicals, he used to clean the bones. All this was done in a dense bush near the Jharia bridge. Once clean and preserved, the skeletons were shipped to Calcutta and from there, to different countries.

Things did not stop despite crackdowns in south Bihar. On 13 November, 1980, 103 skulls were recovered. This time it was in Purnia district in north Bihar. It was alleged that Ananda Margis had something to do with the skulls. However, the matter remains to be solved.

Further crackdowns were initiated. The Patna Police busted a gang involved in the trade. A number of skulls were also recovered from the banks of the Ganges, near the Buddha colony in Patna. Only when the matter was raised in Assembly that the then government decided to ban the practice. As a result, the gangs shifted their base to Nepal.

Even then, there was no respite. In 1998, the police in Nepal intercepted a truck loaded with 197 skulls. The truck was on its way from Bihar to Kathmandu. Patna hit the headlines again in 1991 when, on 12 July, a man called Surender Prasad was arrested by the police while he was on his way to Motihari. Prasad had 80 skulls with him. During interrogation, he divulged that he had been collecting them from the graveyards and cremation grounds located on the banks of Ganga. He supplied these to a gang in Motihari. On 4 May, 1993, the Nepal police again seized skulls concealed in vegetable sacks

at the Inrewa check post. Rameshwar Choudhary and Ramesh Yadav were arrested with 31 skulls.

In a major haul on 8 July, 1996, more than 300 skulls were found on the banks of the Phalgu river in Gaya district. Three persons, Kishori Sah, Prabhu Sah and Viswanath Sah were arrested. Following interrogation, it came to light that the three were in the gory business for the past ten years. The business came to light only after partners fell out with one another.

But the haul at Gaya also revealed the details. According to Kishori, they were in touch with the local scavengers and paid Rs 5 for each skull. These were then sold, in bulk, to a gangster called Babulal Prasad from Dudhiyawan-Saraiya village under Paharpur police station in Gaya district.

It was Babulal who cleaned the skulls and sold them to statue-makers in Kathmandu. It also came to light that the skulls were decorated and sold to tourists at a very high price. Some were also sent to foreign countries for research work. The same happened with bones.

Officials told SUNDAY that there were two main routes for those engaged in the bizarre business. One leads to Virganj in Nepal through Motihari and Raxaul. The other one is to Viratnagar via Purnia and Jogbani. On the basis of information extracted from those arrested, the police have been able to bust several gangs operating in West Bengal, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi.

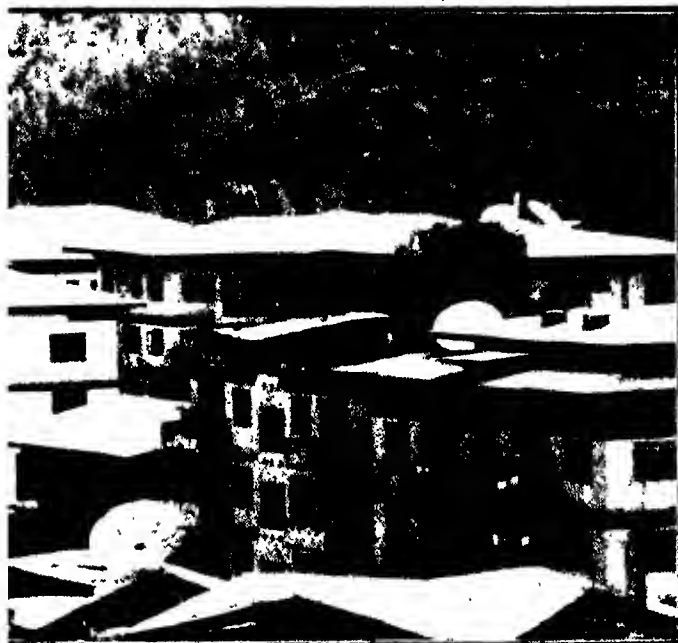
Speaking to SUNDAY, Patna SP Manvinder Singh Bhatia said that the police were also trying to find out where the skulls were treated chemically and where they were sliced. "Very soon, the entire racket will be busted," he observed. •

Naved Zahir/Patna

Bhutan before. But prior to its recent "official" entry, owning a dish antenna was not only taboo but was also illegal. Watching television used to be more of a forbidden pleasure. But many indulged in it, lapping up the latest in Hindi films.

Since last year, before the world cup soccer, things start-

CONNECTING PEOPLE: mushrooming dish antennae



ed moving fast. Known for his love for the game, King Jigme Singye allowed colleges to set up receivers so that young people could watch their favourite teams in action in France. Incidentally, soccer is the Bhutan's second-most popular recreation, next only to archery.

This royal patronage gave cable operators an idea of the shape of things to come. It also made them come out in the open. Some cable operators were no doubt running clandestine cable network businesses. Almost overnight, dishes could be seen, waiting eagerly to pick up signals showered from heaven. Soon, cables were being laid to wire up homes. The cable operators never had it so good. Nor did people of Bhutan for whom the outside world suddenly came indoors.

In one year's time since then, the scenario has changed completely. In Bhutan, owning a television set is no longer a taboo and dishes have mushroomed all over the place. Young people can be seen engaged in animated conversations over MTV or other popular programmes over a cup of tea or coffee.

Along the way from Siliguri in West Bengal to Phuntsholing, one can see dishes lapping up the latest. From Phuntsholing, the hardware needed to set up cable operations is supplied to different parts of Bhutan. Dealers have reported brisk sales and a snazzy Sony Centre has come up in Thimphu city centre.

While it is too early to comment on the effects of television on a society which was so long in isolation, the enthusiasm among people are in abundance. Right now, the Bhutanese are busy lapping up prime-time action. •

Arnob Das Gupta/Thimphu

Peeping Toms

Apraadhi takes the easy way out

There was a time when, if you got access to the slot reserved for women and children on Doordarshan, you had it made. You could pass off any crass offering between the dead zone of 1 pm and 6 pm as a masterpiece and because there were no options, your programme even got into repeats.

Then the national network discovered that you could spread prime time across some of those hours, and so, suddenly, women got a better deal. Taking a cue from the satellites, they got soaps, serials, chat shows, and currently, the afternoon slot being solidly booked with family sagas and cute sitcoms, homemakers have never had it so good.

Which is why it is surprising to see the 'women and children' tag being misused on Star Plus in *Apraadhi*. When it was introduced some months ago, anchor Nitish Bharadwaj was at great pains to tell us how it was different from Zee's popular *India's Most Wanted*. *Apraadhi*, unlike *IMW*, would focus on crimes against women and



BROKEN PROMISE: Nitish Bharadwaj

children because they made the most vulnerable victims.

It started off well. The first episode was on the spunky commuter who lost her legs in a Bombay local as she resisted a goon's attempt to grab her purse, and it was nicely done, barring the excessive use of violent images. In the last few episodes, however, a heavy dollop of sleaze has been added to the story-telling. An NRI husband beats up his newly-wed and sends her off to bathe, with an admonition, and a loathsome smirk: *Main aa raha hoon, kapde nahin pahenna* (I'm coming, don't wear clothes). In another instance, a man leads a little girl away behind a house, and minutes later, you can see his buttocks jerking. How does this serve women and children?

Apraadhi comes on at 8.30 pm, early prime time, and is sure to have children watching. What they will remember are the disgustingly voyeuristic snatches, not the moralistic bits Bharadwaj embeds in the episode. •

NORTH-EAST

Fast buck

The north-east is fast becoming a major sourcing point for illegal trade in wildlife

The illegal trade in live birds has emerged as a booming business across the world and the north-eastern states of India have become a major sourcing point. According to estimates by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the global trade, only in birds, is worth around US\$ 44 million. Apart from birds, the trade also involves other species of wildlife like rhino, elephants and reptiles. The horns, ivory and the hide are much in demand. WWF estimates also put the global turnover from clandestine wildlife business next only to that from illegal arms and drug trafficking.

Among foreign countries, Japan has emerged as a major destination for smuggled snake skin, tiger and primate hides and bones from the north-east. An estimated 2,500 pieces of snake skins find their way to the Far East each year, the value of which is around Rs 3 crores. Activists point out that Japan has become the favoured destination because the country has no legal restriction on the sale of animal organs. Snake and tiger skin are much in demand by the Japanese as these are used in the manufacture of footwear, bags, food products and medicines.

The Indian north-east, which has the largest reserve forest cover in the entire country, reportedly has nearly all the 230-odd snake species available in India, apart from several other species of reptiles. Sources say that the clandestine traffic in wildlife takes place through Bangladesh, from where these are sent off to Japan and other countries in the Far East.

There is a sordid pattern in the way the birds are transported. On the average, two of the three birds die while they are being taken from one place to another. One of the birds usually die while being captured and the other, during transportation. Around 14 to 20 million birds are reportedly captured every year to feed the illegal trade. While all of these are caught from the wild, around 3.5 to 5 million are actually documented in the international market.

What is worrying wildlife activists is the alarming increase in the volume of this clandestine activity. WWF sources point out that the situation is specially grim in India. About 1.2 million birds of various species were reportedly smuggled out of the country via illegal trade routes of Kathmandu to different destinations in Europe and North America in 1994-95.

Authorities have tried to initiate crackdowns. These have not made any appreciable dent in the thriving business. Following the ban on this trade, more than 50,000 birds in captivity were seized from various parts of the country, with most of them confiscated from Delhi in 1990-91. Between 1970 and 1976 at least 13 million birds were exported from India to several countries. This comes to nearly 1.85 million birds per year on the average.

There is need for effective action so that this menace is contained. Otherwise, like other natural resources of the north-east, its unique bio-diversity will also be under severe strain. •

Dileep Chanden/Guwahati



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 11 JULY, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

Don't get too excited about new developments in property affairs. Deals and agreements can fall through just at the last moment. Activities and projects that have overrun the time allotted to them may have to run on for a while longer. Be prepared to change course in employment affairs.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

Hold back and give others time to make up their minds. It is best to approach routine work in a more experimental way. Innovative methods can save time. Keep a lower, though not less active, profile in business activities. Loved ones may persuade you to spend more on extravagant activities.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Don't make mountains out of mole-hills. Keep things in perspective. It will be easier for you take insult where none is intended. Speculative activities, specially those involving a lot of cash are probably right on course for disaster. It may be best to pull out or steer well clear.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

Loved ones may be in a restless or irritable state of mind. It seems they have a bone to pick with you and you had better hear them out. Try to calm their fears. The quality of services you have supplied to others will stand as an excellent recommendation.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

Wires are likely to get crossed if you attempt to mix business and pleasure. Keep your mind on one thing at a time. Professional activities need a more single-minded and thorough approach. Show others that you truly mean what you say and intend to make a success of current undertakings.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

Charm and goodwill can be effective in melting the hardest of hearts. You should now insist that others must give you definite answers, especially concerning financial affairs. You may have a key role to play in raising money for worthwhile causes. Do not be put off by stiff competition or opposition.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

You may be taking things to absurd lengths in your search for perfection. Time can probably be used to greater effect than in striving for such high quality. Loved ones are likely to be feel more in control of events in their lives. Much can be achieved if you are ready to apply yourself.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

People may be out to make a fool of you. You should now call on some healthy skepticism, especially in respect to what you are told. Reports coming via intermediaries are best checked with higher authorities. You may be the butt of mild jokes. New romantic meetings are on the cards so don't be surprised.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

People upon whom you are relying can drag their heels, so that your own working processes are held up. You may have to warm up co-workers or suppliers if valuable time is not to be wasted. Tensions at home can make quarrels difficult to avoid but you should do all you can to preserve the peace.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

You may have to find ways of combating the underhanded methods used by business competitors. They may go to some lengths to get the upper hand or to win new contracts. Family members may be holding something back and subtle quizzing may be required.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

More diplomacy is required when addressing officials whether by letter or face-to-face. Punctuality in occupational affairs is crucial. Do not waste your own working time with chitchat. Professional affairs may take second place to home and family obligations.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

You should be left more to your own devices. But problems can arise because boredom sets in. It is by looking for activities to fill in gaps or provide excitement that you can land yourself in trouble. You may also drag your friends into deep water with you.

Paper chase

■ And at the seminar in Kathmandu, chief economic adviser Shankar Acharya presented a paper on India's external debt.

Guess where that came from? It was a recycled copy of the White Paper on Indi-



Shankar Acharya:
transparent

a's external debt which was slipped into the Parliament House library two days before it was presented in Kathmandu. The media at Kathmandu got copies of the White Paper a day before the Indian media did.

Now here's genuine transparency for you.

Problem of plenty

■ Why does India complain that it doesn't get aid? We get so much of it that we don't know how to spend it.

Take the International Development Agency aid — soft loans at the rate of two per cent interest — given to the finance ministry's exter-

HEARD AT THE MADRAS STOCK EXCHANGE

Essar? No ear!

A BROKER ABOUT THE PROSPECTS OF THE
RUIA-OWNED, CASH-STRAPPED ESSAR
GROUP OF INDUSTRIES

nal debt cell. The money was meant for computerisation, data collection, etc.

The finance ministry realised that it had a surplus from last year and didn't know how to spend it. So three months ago, it held a seminar at Kovalam. Officials from the RBI, scholars, etc. were flown down for it.

Good. There was still some money left, even after computerisation. A South Asia-level seminar was organised at Kathmandu, all expenses paid, so that it could justify a meeting at a less developed country capital.

But even then, the ministry was unable to spend all the money. So it is now plan-

ning another get-together at Singapore. Finance ministry officials are open to other suggestions, rather exotic locales.

Sanitary habits

■ Union minister of agriculture Sompal was the chief guest at a seminar on agricultural scientists held in Delhi recently.

It was quite a serious affair. So maybe for that reason, the minister decided to



Sompal: fertile ideas

liven up the proceedings.

He announced that as a student he was no good in statistics — it was the one subject he failed to grasp. But he did know about agriculture.

Take Indian sanitary habits, he said. In urban India, we use urinals and flush and waste hundreds of litres of water. On the other hand, people in villages know how to do it right. They take a *lota* and squat out in the field. So you don't even need urea; they're fertilising the soil right there.

More ministers like this one and you can turn Parliament into a gigantic Sulabh Shauchalaya! •

CHECK-LIST

The Pakistani economy: new statistics

■ **External debts:** Although a 1.56 million dollar loan from the IMF helped prevent a debt repayment default, Pakistan's external financing position is still unstable

■ **State of the Budget:** The 1999-2000 Budget doesn't reflect any measures to handle fiscal imbalances, in the midst of an industrial recession.

■ **Shrinking output:** The rate of growth of output in the economy has actually fallen (4.3 per cent in 1997-98 to 3.1 per cent in 1998-99)

■ **As a result:** Both exports and investments have dropped correspondingly

■ **Value addition:** Despite having a large textile industry, Pakistan's only big manufacturing sector, there is virtually no value addition

■ **Cost of the face-off with India:** The Kargil venture is putting even more pressure on the economy, which is showing signs of stagnation.

Ticket to politics

Can anyone explain why lottery king and acknowledged history-shooter M.K. Subba is playing such an important role in Congress politics?

Quite apart from the fact that he chipped in when the BSP needed to be 'managed' during the vote of confidence in the dissolved Lok

HEARD IN THE BJP HEADQUARTERS

Q: What is the difference between the Congress and the BJP?

A: The Congress had a working president and the BJP has a non-working president.

AN EXASPERATED WORKER



Sonia Gandhi: her rally in Gangtok was organised by Subba

Sabha, for some inexplicable reason, he has been made party observer for Sikkim. (See story elsewhere.)

Congress president Sonia Gandhi recently addressed a rally in Gangtok, obviously on the advice of her War Council. This rally was organised and financed by Subba.

And the Congress would have us believe it is fighting the criminalisation of politics.

New plans

Here's some news on K.J. Alphonse, the bureaucrat who wants to change the world.

going to do it. At Washington recently, Alphonse organised an exhibition of paintings of his son Adarsh, and told newspapers which had come to report on the exhibition, that he was going to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

No one asked him if he was thinking of contesting an Indian or an American election.

Nothing unofficial about it

A major bureaucratic reshuffle is slated to be carried out on 15 July,

CHECK-LIST

In denial: those who've said 'no' to elections

Sushma Swaraj: After her last victory and the massive intra-party sabotage that preceded it, she is no longer sure whom to trust. She's said that she won't contest the Lok Sabha elections, but sources say she may be persuaded otherwise.

L.K. Advani: Wants to concentrate on putting the party back on the rails. For him, not contesting the Lok Sabha will be an act of sacrifice because he has every chance of winning from Gandhinagar.

Arjun Singh: Mystery surrounds his announcement that he will stay out of the elections this time. (See story elsewhere.) But given his proximity to Sonia Gandhi, obviously this is a well thought out decision.

Anand Mohan: The outspoken Marxist economist has refused a Rajya Sabha seat and is not going to contest the Lok Sabha either. According to CPI(M) sources, Mohan is unhappy at the party's close ties to the Congress.



B.P. Singh: next stop, Washington

before the Election Commission announces dates for the general elections.

Fifteenth July because the government has time till then to decide who the next finance secretary will be. The naming of the new finance secretary will be clubbed with new secretaries in several ministries.

Among those who are likely to be shifted around are Anil Kumar (secretary telecommunication). Revenue secretary Javed Choudhury, heavy industries secretary P. Shankar and a new secretary for the department of Indian Systems of Medicine (did you know such a department existed). The current secretary, Shanta Shetty has gone to the Central Administrative Tribunal.

As the present health secretary B.P. Singh is going to Washington, a new incumbent has to be appointed in his place. Expect major changes in the middle of July.

Strictly confidential

What happened to the White Paper on the activities of the inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) which home minister L.K. Advani promised to lay on the table of Parliament several months ago?



L.K. Advani: what happened to the White Paper?

A paper was prepared in painstaking detail and some chapters were sent to the Military Intelligence for vetting.

But then it disappeared. Sure this is the time when it should be made public? So why was it put in cold storage?

No one seems to know. If Parliament and the country were not to be taken into confidence, why was the offer of a White Paper made in Parliament at all?

The World Bank story

And we all thought it was L.K. Advani's fault. When the uncharismatic — and some say under-qualified — B.P. Singh was nominated to the World Bank everyone assumed that Advani was trying to do his protégé a good turn. The home minister did not con-

HEARD IN THE BJP HEADQUARTERS

If they want Rajya Sabha, we should give them Rajyaneeti

A MEMBER OF THE BJP EXECUTIVE ON HOW THE PARTY SHOULD DEAL WITH THE OPPOSITION DEMAND FOR CONVENING THE RAJYA SABHA

tradict the rumours.

But when his close friends started to accuse him of playing favourites, Advani broke his silence. He told them that he was not the one who had suggested Singh's name. However, when the recommendation was put before him, he did say that he had no objections.

Then who suggested Singh's name in the first place? The recommendation came from the last place one would have thought Singh would have any friends — the Prime Minister's Office.

CHECK-LIST

The strong and silent men (and women) of Indian politics

■ **Atal Behari Vajpayee:** Try talking to him and you wonder where those entertaining, witty speeches come from. Holding a conversation with Vajpayee is heavy going — there is a half-hour gap between every word and you come out of the meeting having sat for an hour-and-a-half but having exchanged just three words.

■ **P.V. Narasimha Rao:** SUNDAY once referred to him as a sedated bull frog, which in retrospect was unfair. When he is talking about literature and culture, Narasimha Rao is effervescent himself. But on politics, he is prone to uttering three grunts between three words and half-hour gaps in between the words.

■ **Sonia Gandhi:** Never talks, only listens and has never given a media interview so it is hard to figure out whether she is a good conversationalist.

■ **C.K. Moopanar:** The original tall and dark hero of Indian politics. Much of the time the pain in his mouth makes it difficult for him to speak. But when he does decide what it has to say and speak in his mouth, words issue forth with such explosive force that it is impossible to figure out what he's saying. The stand-up comic he stands in remarkably like the late Mr. Bhausaheb Patil who used to perform in the same way.

Out of form

At first he couldn't do anything wrong. But, now it seems that P.R. Kumarangalam can't do anything right.

First he got into a spat with the press — all because television journalists arrived late for his briefings. And so what if the journalists were delayed because they were trying to get a soundbite out of the Prime Minister? Anyway the incident (where he froze out a TV reporter because he was more interested in the views of the PM) has had such an impact that



Rangarajan Kumarangalam: trying times

Ranga is staying away from the briefings.

Unfortunately, no one has restrained him from giving interviews. During a TV interview last week, Ranga decided to take on the President of India. He said that K.R. Narayanan was putting pressure on the government to call a Rajya Sabha session.

Naturally, the President was furious. And Ranga was asked to apologise. So far, he's told the BJP the President has a soft spot for him. In fact, he had offered himself as the conduit between the BJP and the Rashtrapati Bhavan since he was asked to accompany Narayanan as the minister-in-waiting on his foreign tour.

But now it seems the communication channel has broken down. •

Mountains wanting to feel your weight

Forests waiting to be caressed

Waves jumping to touch your face

An ageing aunt longing to hold your hand

A childhood friend distanced by work



WHERE NEXT?



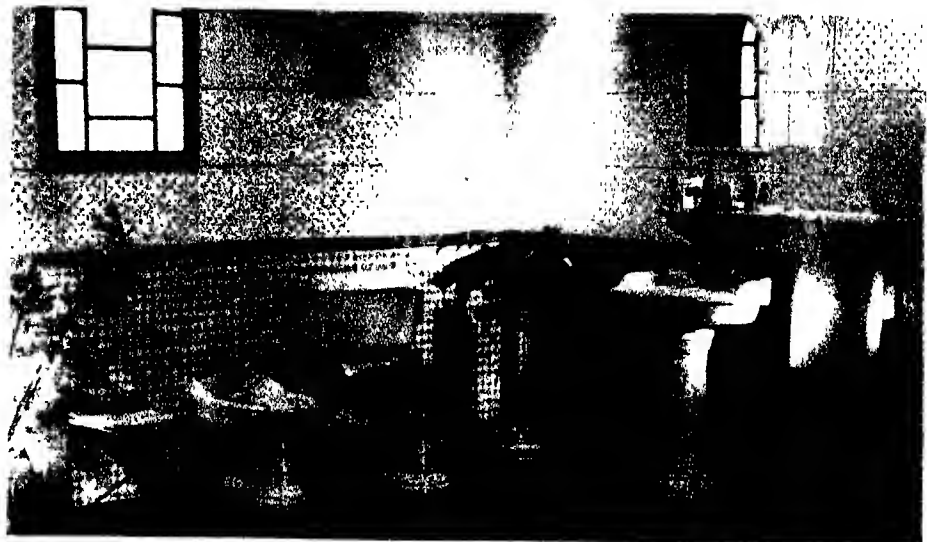
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LEANDER PAES: TALKING TO THE CHAMPION

SUNDAY



VICTORY!

He died, he got maimed, but he won Kargil back for India :

THE INDIAN JAWAN

• Interview with the army chief

Narrowing your business to just one market



The world

But the world is changing faster every day. Globalization means global competition. And global competition needs a powerful partner who understands your domestic and cross border strategic business needs. A partner that understands you.

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Life on the line

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COVER STORY 40 Victory!

The Indian *jawan*: he died, he got maimed, but he won Kargil back for India

CONVERSATION 28 'I hope this shows that Indians can be world-beaters'

Leander Paes on Wimbledon, the tour, and life outside tennis





Patriotic fervour

The cover story *People's war* (4-10 July) was a deft compilation of how Indians from all walks of life rallied around to demonstrate their solidarity in reaching out to our brave soldiers. Viewed cynically, we had to have something like a 'war-like' situation to reawaken the otherwise dormant patriotic fervour in us.

If the Kargil conflict has evoked a never-seen before kind of patriotism, it is due to the visual media of today. If the print and visual media of the country, feel morally obliged towards the war victims and keep covering stories about the devastations and its victims, it will certainly go a long way in helping them. Or else, the Kargil victims may suffer the same fate as the war victims of yore.

Though the article suggests that the unbounded patriotism demonstrated by the people could be channelised and translated into work *a la* post-war Germany and Japan — with the sorry state of our work culture, it may not be plausible to implement in our country.

Nalini Sudhakaran,
Trivandrum (Kerala)

■ All political parties and various state governments are vying with one another to offer to the kith and kin of those killed in Kargil. Cash compensations, accommoda-

tion, jobs, land etc. These cannot by themselves fully compensate the real losses suffered by these families.

However, isn't it strange that not a single political party has so far offered any seats in the Assemblies or Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha for relatives of those killed in Kargil? Is it difficult to find an individual, for instance, from any of these bereaved families, intellectually or otherwise equal to Sonia Gandhi or Priyanka Wadhe ra or Rahul Gandhi, to lead this country? When that comes about, this country would really transform itself. The destiny of this country is linked with these martyrs and their families, not with one exploitative dynasty.

M.V. Sundararaman, Madras
(Tamil Nadu)

Indian air force pays homage to Sq. Leader Ajay Ahuja: death of a hero



Contrived coinage

The columnist in his article (*The Moopanur of Maharashtra*, 6-12 June) has coined an acronym — **Ass** — for the new party formed by Sharad Pawar. This is flawed in that he has taken A from Tariq Anwar's last name, S from Purno Sangma's last name but S from Sharad Pawar's first name. There has to be some consistency in this. It should also be a natural, not contrived effort.

M.V. Sundararaman, Madras
(Tamil Nadu)

■ The columnist's penchant for vilification is nothing but exhibitionist outpouring of a frustrated retired government servant. He just wants to show off his mastery of archaic English and pejora-

tive expression. Just look at these words: Georgie-Porgie, unmatched impressario Pramod Mahajan, and faint heart Sushma Swaraj etc. Earlier, he has used equally offensive terms against other leaders Murli Manohar Joshi (knicker-wala), and Advani (Hindutva fanatic).

N. Krishnamurthy,
Secunderabad Cantt. (Andhra Pradesh)

Factual error

As a contemporary of I.K. Gujral, I would like to share some vital facts about Gujral's life and career which have not been mentioned in the profile (*The intellectual*, 20-26 June).

Contrary to what the profile implies I.K. Gujral's political career started much before he came to Delhi as a refugee in 1947. He was an acknowledged student leader of Punjab and was imprisoned during the freedom struggle. In fact, he had also been to jail while still a baby with his mother, who along with her husband, a veteran freedom fighter and Punjab Congress leader, suffered imprisonment a number of times.

It is well-known that during the turbulent period, Gujral not only visited Punjab but had also founded the Punjab Group which made significant contributions towards solving the militancy problems. Gujral was instrumental in persuading Sant Longowal in signing the Rajiv-Longowal Pact. Meetings of Punjab Group at Gujral's house were attended by leaders like Atal Behari Vajpayee and Chandra Sekhar on one hand and Parkash Singh Badal and Barnala on the other hand. It was during this period that Gujral coined and projected 'Punjabiati' as the secularist concept against separatism of the



I.K. Gujral: crusader for secular polity

Punjab militants.

During the infamous 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi, Gujral had backed the Sikh Forum which had been started by eminent Sikhs. Those who covered or witnessed Gujral's election to Lok Sabha from Jalandhar remember it very well that BJP as a party never openly came out to support Gujral's candidature. Gujral's opposition to the BJP government at the Centre, notwithstanding excellent personal rapport between Vajpayee and Gujral, has been in consonance with his life-long crusade for a secular polity.

I also refer to your insinuations against Gujral under the column Delhi Diary in the same issue. Gujral's criticism of George Fernandes' guffaw as defence minister is not personal but is in the best interests of the country during the present critical juncture and it is overwhelmingly shared both by the people and the media, even by BJP leaders.

Trilochan Singh, New Delhi

Quiet firmness

In Kannada, there is a proverb — In broad daylight, he fell into a well that he had recognised even in the dark night! (*Fight the real battle, 4—10 July*). Notwithstanding the talk of the infiltrators being pushed back, reports in fact, speak of the increasing reinforcements of materials and men including trained men drawn from the Pak army.

Prime Minister Vajpayee merits universal endorsement for the policy of quiet firmness in dealing with the Kargil conflict. Regardless of what George Fernandes says, in ordering the return of the body of Sq.Ldr. Ajay Ahuja, or the release of Fl. Lt. Nachiketa, Nawaz Sharif has left no one in doubt that he is the boss of the Pak Army, of the ISI and of Pakistan in general. Good for us! Nehru, on the floor of the Parliament, sold-pedalled the annexation through war, of thousands of square kilometers of Indian territory by China in 1962. That territory is now ours only in our maps! In the India-Pakistan war, when Lal Bahadur Shastri was our Prime Mini-

ster, strategically important locations in Pakistan and PoK territory, including "Chicken Neck," were occupied by our forces at tremendous cost of human lives.

India accepted Soviet mediation. Shastri and Ayub Khan of Pakistan, met in Tashkent in the presence of Kosygin, the then Soviet Prime Minister. India agreed to hand back to Pakistan, virtually on a platter, all that it had gained! Shastri's sudden death at Tashkent, within minutes of signing the agreement, spared him the ignominy of returning and facing ridicule in India.

The comic anger of Nawar Singh in a TV debate, recently, at the inability of the present government to protect our territorial integrity, amused me as much as the tantrums of the jellyfish which constitute the ruling coterie in the rump of a party called Congress **N. Narasimhan, Bangalore (Karnataka)**

■ The brutal torture meted out to our surrendered soldiers by Pakistan was reprehensible, barbaric and reminiscent of the cruelty and savagery heaped on hapless Hindus by the marauding North western invaders

before the arrival of the British. It is reminiscent of the cruelty heaped on the Sikh sacred Gurus by the Mughals. **Capt. Navnith Krishnan (retd), Bangalore (Karnataka)**

Simply ludicrous

Mani Shankar Aiyar's accusations about the functioning of the defence ministry and the minister are ludicrous (*Who next for Prime Minister? 4—10 July*). As general secretary of my party, it is my duty to know facts concerning the functioning and concerns of my party president who is also defence minister. If Mr. Vajpayee is attacked, do the BJP general secretaries not defend him? Obviously, Mr Aiyar's concern for women's empowerment is only skin-deep, if he thinks women general secretary cannot or should not speak on defence matters. Our party made national security a major concern in the last Lok Sabha elections and all of us have informed views on policies relating to security. Let not seminarists and armchair commentators alone consider themselves 'experts'.

It is equally rude and chauvinistic to compare me to Niloufer Bhagwat who was wife playing many other roles while the husband was initially quiet. I am not anything other than the general secretary and spokesperson of my party fully authorised to counter political attacks of the likes of the Congress. It is clear to anyone that his party's cheap criticism of the government and the defence minister is not reflective of the mood of the people. The rest of the articles in your magazine prove it.

Why not change the name of your column from Mani-Talk to Mani-Babble? **Jaya Jaitly, general secretary, Samata Party**

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

PRIZE RS.200 FOR CONTRIBUTIONS



Romila Thapar

Historian



Pippa Seth

Philosopher

Contributed by Bikash Chandra Pradhan, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

AWARDED: to Dr Prasanta Bhowmik, general practitioner, the British Medical Association's prestigious Sir James Cameron Award. Bhowmik, who was inspired by Mother Teresa, practises in Newham, England.

DIED: Asok Mitra, former secretary to the President of India, on 9 July, in Calcutta. He was 82. He authored several books.

DIED: M.L. Jaisimha, former Test cricketer, on



7 July, in Hyderabad. He was 60 and is survived by his wife and two sons.

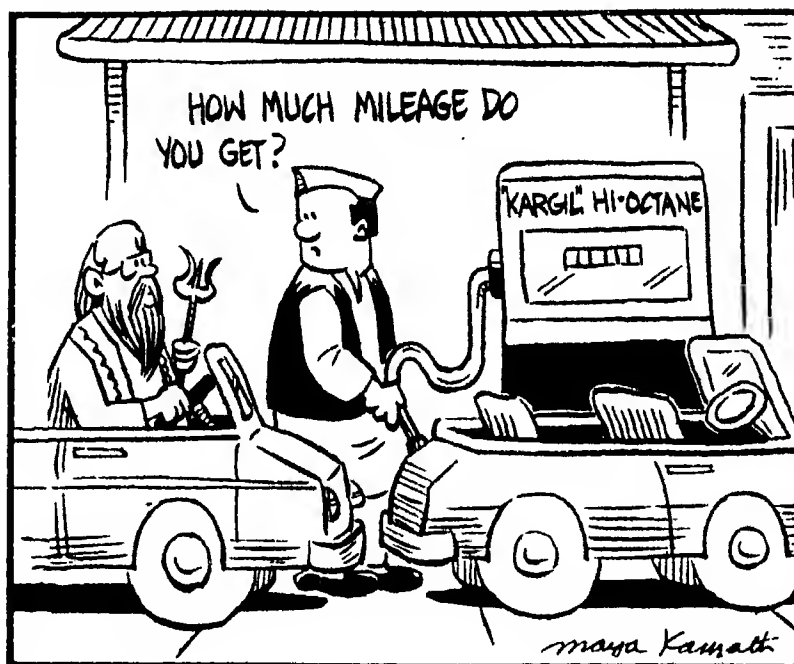
DIED: Priyambada Devi, freedom fighter and Orissa's first woman legislator, in Cuttack, on 8 July. She was 102.

APPOINTED: A.N. Joshi, as executive director of the Bombay Stock Exchange, on 8 July. He succeeds R.C. Mathur who resigned under controversial circumstances.

ELECTED: S. Balwant, as president of the Federation of Indian Publishers.

SANCTIONED: Rs 6.5 crore, by the Maharashtra government, to convert 'INS Vikrant' into a war memorial.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ If they don't respond now, there will be more Kargils here and there.

SARTAJ AZIZ, Pakistan foreign minister, urging the international community to put pressure on New Delhi to find a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem

■ I have seen for the first time that all the people of Shillong have become one through my son's sacrifice. I am happy for that.

SALIY NONGRUM, mother of Capt. Keishung Clifford Nongrum who laid down his life at Kargil

■ The festering wound of social discrimination has been eating away at the vitals of our body politic.

KUSHABHAU THAKRE, BJP president, addressing a Dalit gathering in Patna



■ Do I have to prove my love for this country? I can lay down my life for this nation. What is there in an award?

DILIP KUMAR, thespian, during the 'Nishan-e-Pakistan' controversy

■ We are Marxists. We don't celebrate birthdays.

JYOTI BASU, West Bengal chief minister, on his 86th birthday

■ West Bengal has the potential to be a commercial hub of an emerging economic space.

MICHAEL CLARK, executive director of the United States-India Business Council

■ He was simply a legend and I consider myself lucky that I could watch him so closely, from a distance of 22 yards.

CHETAN CHAUHAN, former Test opener, on Sunil Gavaskar who turned 50 recently

SEEN

THE REAL HEROES

Anupam Kher does his bit for the brave men of Kargil



IN SUPPORT OF THE JAWANS: Kher, Brigadier Dixit and Jatin at the press conference in Delhi

In real life as well as reel life, he is better known for making people laugh. But a different side of Anupam Kher's personality was on view in Delhi last week. "We are zeros. They are the real heroes. Really, we are nothing," he said in a shaky voice, tears streaming down his face. Whether they were for real or not, we'll never know. But there was no glycerine bottle in sight.

The occasion was a press conference about a star-studded charity event, *Aye Watan Tere Liye*, in aid of the *jawans*, which was to be held in Delhi. Initially, Kher behaved true to type. He arrived late accompanied by Jatin Pandit (of the Jatin-Lalit duo) and a representative of the army, Brigadier Ramesh Dixit.

But Kher didn't look very cheerful. As he sat down, he hardly looked up from his notes, ignoring calls from photographers for a picture. "It is nice of us to suddenly remember the *jawans* when we see dead bodies coming back, not the real, living people we sent to the front," he began. As the press conference progressed, he dived under the table several times after begging to be excused, presumably to indulge in a flood of tears, emerging red-eyed after a few seconds from below the dais.

When he had recovered somewhat, he said the purpose of the event and the others that he was planning was to "remind the people that the *jawans* exist in times of peace as well".

He then explained what had moved him so much: he had visited injured soldiers at the army hospital only that morning and was overwhelmed by their response

to the attention they were getting from India. "What they need, more than the money, is the warmth of the nation. They want to feel wanted, that they are not alone in this battle. When the entire film industry shows its warmth, they are going to feel wanted," went on the suddenly-vocal Kher.

Defending accusations that the film industry uses situations like this for grabbing media attention, he said, "We don't need publicity. We are already the most publicised industry in India. Moreover, every time there is a calamity, we are the first ones to contribute, ahead of everyone."

Kher said that this event was not a one-time event to expiate guilt. For this event, 2,000 tickets would be reserved for *jawans* and eminent personalities like Dilip Kumar, Amitabh Bachchan, Anil Kapoor, Nana Patekar, Yash Chopra, Udit Narayan, etc., would be present. "But we would also like to meet the families of the *jawans*, sponsor their children's education, help them in every possible way."

With Anupam Kher present, no one else got a chance to speak much. A somewhat shy and inarticulate Jatin managed to say a few words to convey how happy he was to be involved in the show.

In the end, it was a cynic rather than a comedian who said, "We have become so hardened in life that to create sympathy we have to play on the emotions of the people." It just shows how good at his job Anupam Kher is. •

Garima Kaur/New Delhi

"What they [the *jawans*] need is the warmth of the nation. They want to feel wanted, that they're not alone in this battle," said Kher

Why not a Rajya

The fascist mind-set of the BJP



The BJP mode is the fascist mode. The fascist mode is to ride the populist wave but not be accountable to the people's representatives. Mussolini showed his contempt

for democracy when he marched on the Italian Parliament to snuff it out. The BJP may not have an Italian-born leader, but its ideas of governance have their origin in Italy alright.

The BJP adamantly refuses to convene the Rajya Sabha to discuss the situation arising out of Pakistan's aggression in the Kargil sector. It heads a government that has already lost the confidence of the Lok Sabha. Which is why the House stands dissolved. The Constitution requires the House to be reconstituted within six months. There is, therefore, no alternative to elections in September to be certain of the House being convened by 22 October to maintain the sanctity of the Constitution. Flush with their military victory in Kargil, the BJP is not averse to elections come September. But when it comes to holding a Rajya Sabha session at which their many and varied acts of omission and commission will be ruthlessly exposed, they balk. The argument is that, in the midst of a military conflict, it would wreck the morale of our brave *jawans* to have the conflict discussed in Parliament.

That, of course, is the argument that should have occurred to young Vajpayee, when on 26 October, 1999, he led a Jan Sangh delegation to call on Jawaharlal Nehru. We were bang in the midst of a war. On 20 October, the Chinese hordes had descended from the Thagla ridge, crossed the Namka Chu river and

overrun Brig. Dalvi's post at Dhola. (For the details, the reader is invited to re-read Dalvi's *Himalayan Blunder*). Over the next four days, the Chinese swept all before them and captured Tawang. In the middle sector (northern UP), there were a number of hot engagements. In the western sector, our boys put up a stiff resistance but the Chinese advanced so far into Ladakh that Leh itself was threatened.

On 24 October, the Chinese paused. All of NEFA lay before them. And all of Ladakh lay at their feet. Never has India been more threatened than it was then. No one knew where the Chinese would stop. New Delhi itself might, it was believed, be their objective. Yet, the same Vajpayee who today shies away from a Rajya Sabha session, demanded that an "emergency" session of the Rajya Sabha be called to discuss the situation arising out of the Chinese aggression along the length of our northern borders.



THE FASCIST MODE is not the Congress mode. The role model of the Congress is not an Italian dictator. Nehru, therefore, graciously conceded Vajpayee's demand. The Rajya Sabha was convened on 8 November. The following day, Vajpayee delivered himself of a thundering speech which, since its rediscovery by me a few weeks ago, has come to haunt him. His words are, however, irrefutably recorded in the proceedings of the day. Vajpayee viciously condemned the government of the day, criticised senior army commanders, portrayed the army as inadequate in numbers and lacking in everything, insisted on knowing what action had been taken on previous committee reports, demanded to know why the Prime Minister had not been alerted to the dangers facing the country, sought to know who was responsible for keeping the Prime Minister in the dark, expatiated on military tactics and strategy, and expounded at length on foreign policy. No waiting till after the war for a post-mortem Vajpayee demanded his answers here and now.

Who stopped him? No one. He was listened to in respectful silence. His points were responded to in detail — by various Congress spokespersons, in addition to the Prime Minister himself. Vajpayee at the time was a *chutki* of 38 years, representing a party that had but one or two seats in the House. He himself had not made it to the Lok Sabha, although he had been a member in the earlier second Lok Sabha (1957-61). It was some character lost to history called U.M. Trivedi who headed the miniscule Jan Sangh contingent in the Lok Sabha. Comic relief on the outside was provided by Balraj Madhok, an extremist so outrageous that the Jan Sangh itself had to eventually disown him. Instead of

Bill Clinton: his offer of "personal interest" in the affairs of South Asia is a poisoned chalice; yet, the incredibly immature BJP-led government is touting it as a triumph of diplomacy

Sabha session?



On 26 October, 1962, A.B. Vajpayee led a Jan Sangh delegation to call on Jawaharlal Nehru. We were bang in the midst of a war with the Chinese. The same Vajpayee who today shies away from a Rajya Sabha session, demanded that an "emergency" session of the Rajya Sabha be called to discuss the situation arising out of the Chinese aggression along the length of our northern borders

treating this lot as a bunch of jokers. Nehru and his colleagues, in the highest democratic tradition, listened with respect to very pearl of wisdom that fell from their child-like lips — and even adopted several of them. For example, Vajpayee's delegation had demanded the recall of retired army generals to take charge of the conduct of the war. Nehru inducted both Thimayya and Himmat-sinhji, former chiefs of army staff, into the National Defence Council.

That was democracy in action. Following the Rajya Sabha session, the Lok Sabha was summoned for 21 November. Four days before the Lok Sabha was to meet, the Chinese attacked Brig. Hoshiar Singh's redoubt at Se La pass. Not one person suggested postponement of the Lok Sabha session. Between 17 November and the convening of the Lok Sabha on the 21st, Se La fell, then Dirang Dzong, then Bomdila, and the Chinese were at foothills. Further east, Walong fell first, and the Chinese mov-

ed like a knife through butter all the way to Haylung. In Ladakh, every Indian line of defence from the Chip Chap and Galwan valleys in the north all the way south to Demchok were in Chinese hands between the adjourning of the Rajya Sabha and the convening of the

Lok Sabha. Should Vajpayee not have then patriotically demanded the indefinite postponement of the Lok Sabha session? Had he done so, Nehru would have contemptuously dismissed as unpatriotic the idea that calling Parliament is an act of treachery. On the contrary, the government of the day, knowing full well what an impossible task it was to defend the indefensible in Parliament, called Parliament to get itself crucified. And, by God, it was.

IN 1971, PAKISTAN attacked when Parliament was in session. Vajpayee did not propose an immediate adjournment. Why not? Today, he thinks it would demoralise the armed forces to have them praised in Parliament. Why did he think differently then? Why does he think different today?

The fact is that the BJP has never been comfortable with Parliament. While they ran a regular government answerable to Parliament, they took no decisions



K.R. Narayanan: the President, one hopes, will not wait upon the defeated, disgraced Vajpayee's will...It is now up to him to save the tattered remains of our democracy

because they could never get consensus within their own ranks nor carry conviction with Parliament. Now that they have no Parliament, they are truly a fascist government because they are responsible to no one. And so, decisions come galore. Not only senior appointments but the outrage of Jagmohan's dismissal, the scandal over telecom, decisions involving thousands of crores of public money in disinvestments, all come flying thick and fast.

The government wants to run the nation as it wishes. But without being responsible to anyone. Is this democracy? Major foreign policy decisions are in the offing. Clinton's offer of "personal interest" in the affairs of South Asia is a poisoned chalice. Yet, the incredibly immature BJP-led government is touting it as a triumph of diplomacy. The G-8 resolution which has so tickled their pretty little hearts is not entitled "Kargil" but "Kashmir". We are about to be led into the second diplomatic deception in a year. As the Bus to Lahore ended in Kargil, so is Pakistan's withdrawal from Kargil going to lead the Yanks into Kashmir. Yet, Vajpayee thinks he has no

need of taking the Rajya Sabha into confidence

The House of Commons never adjourned to fight either WW-I or WW-II. Indeed, Churchill's disastrous decision to land Allied troops in Gallipoli led to such heated condemnation in the House that Churchill had to resign as First Lord of the Admiralty (i.e., Minister for the Navy). At the start of the Second World War, Chamberlain had to go over Norway. His resignation was forced on the very day (10 May, 1940) that the German armies marched through the Low countries and invested France. A few days later, the Maginot Line was breached and France fell pathetically to the enemy. Master now of all of western Europe, Hitler unleashed his Blitzkrieg on England. Two bombs hit the House of Commons itself as the House sat. Did the MPs run helter-skelter and demand, *a la* the BJP, that Parliament be suspended? On the contrary, the House remained in session with business as normal — Prime Minister's questions and all. That is democracy.

The United States tried to keep out of WW-II as it had in the first till 1917. In

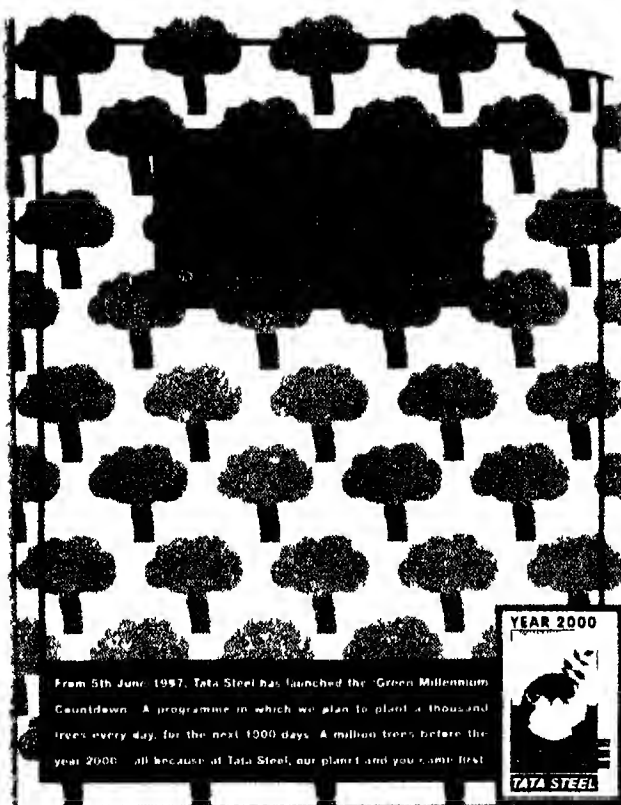


Winston Churchill: his disastrous decision to land Allied troops in Gallipoli led to such heated condemnation in the House that Churchill had to resign as First Lord of the Admiralty

December 1940, the Japanese blasted the American naval fleet out of the water at Pearl Harbour. It was the worst American military disaster since the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Did the US Congress promptly suspend business? On the contrary, they convened to urge President Roosevelt to declare war. He did. Then in 1943, with the Germans at Stalingrad, fought an election against Tom Dewey. That is democracy.

Berlin, Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, Iraq, Somalia, Yugoslavia — for half-a-century, the United States' armed forces have almost constantly engaged in warfare around the globe. US democracy has not been shut down.

Vajpayee's argument is wholly bogus. The President, one hopes, will not wait upon the defeated, disgraced Vajpayee's will. Our Constitution includes the office of President, along with the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha to define the institutions of our Parliament. The Lok Sabha is defunct. The Rajya Sabha is being made defunct. It is now up to the Rashtrapati to save the tattered remains of our democracy. •



Advertisements released on 5th June 1997
to mark the launch of the Green Millennium Countdown

The new millennium

Yes, that is the day when we at Tata Steel heralded a new millennium—the 'Green Millennium'. Fulfilling the pledge we made on

arrived on

5th June 1997, of planting a million trees by the turn of this millennium, well ahead of the schedule. We continue with our

1st October, 1998

programme with renewed zest, stretching our target to plant 1.5 million trees by the year 2000 ushering in a greener millennium for you

TATA STEEL
Where you come first

Profiling the most promising younger leaders in the Congress and the BJP

Agli buri Atal Behari says the BJP. Abki bari, bahu hamari retorts the Congress

This is all very well for now. But what will happen to the Bharatiya Janata Party after Atal Behari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani? And what is the second rank of leadership in the Congress after Sonia Gandhi? In fact, the country's oldest political party is in a worse state than its rival party for it is dominated by a working committee full of doddering, old and uncharismatic Rajya Sabha members.

"There was a time when the Congress was a movement," says BJP general secretary Narendra Modi. "But later, the Congress clustered around a *parivar*. And since then, there has been no attempt to build up leadership," he adds.

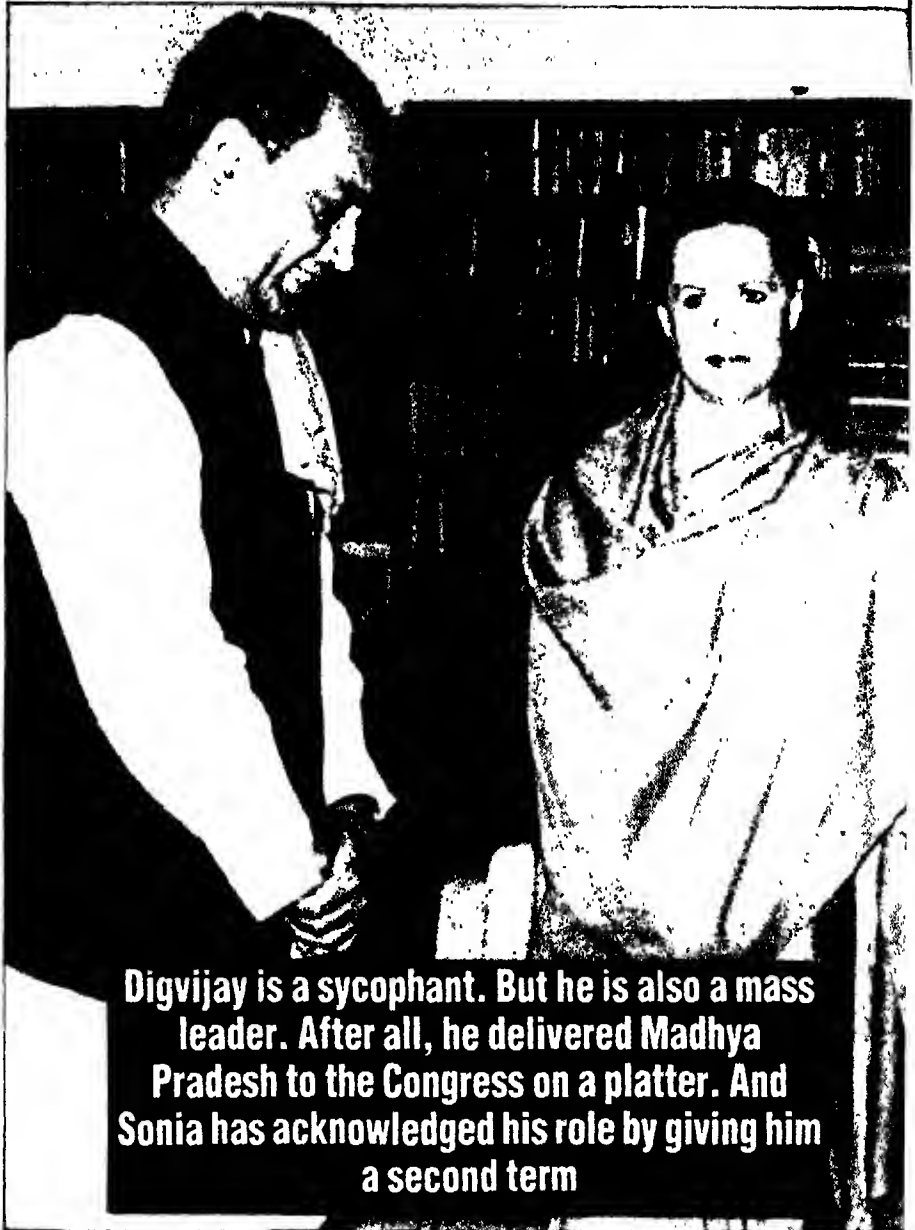
But if the Congress revolves around the Nehru-Gandhi *parivar*, then the BJP has its own *parivar* to deal with. "The BJP is totally controlled by the RSS," points out Rajesh Pilot, a Congress Working Committee member. "And it is the RSS who gets to decide who is the first, second or third rank. The BJP has no control over such a major issue," he adds.

Not true, says Modi. "The *sangh* plays no role. The BJP takes its own decision," he reiterates. And party vice-president K. Jana Krishnamurthi reels off a list of such leaders within the BJP — including Modi — and others such as Venkaiah Naidu, Pramod Mahajan and Sushma Swaraj. "They are already front-rank leaders," he says. Adding, "Most of our leaders are grass-root leaders."

The Congress makes the same claim. Unfortunately the list falls a bit short after going through such names as Digvijay Singh, Madhavrao Scindia, Rajesh Pilot and Ahmed Patel. The party's articulate spokesman Ajit Jogi may claim that the Congress is the only party which has leaders in every state and amongst every section of society, but it is difficult to see such Congressmen as Pranab Mukherjee, Arjun Singh and M.L. Fotedar fitting this bill.

In fact, it was Sharad Pawar who pointed out that the Congress leadership had

The midd



Digvijay is a sycophant. But he is also a mass leader. After all, he delivered Madhya Pradesh to the Congress on a platter. And Sonia has acknowledged his role by giving him a second term

denied him a role at the national level, claiming that he was just a state leader. "Very well," said Pawar. "I accept that I am a state leader. But can you point out even one state leader from the Congress?" he asked.

In an answer to Pawar's query, SUNDAY profiles the second rank of leadership in both the Congress and the BJP. Or, as Narendra Modi quipped: the second rank, first file.

Digvijay Singh

Clearly the man of the moment. He already had youth and charisma on his side. And in November last year, he added a miracle to the list. When Digvijay Singh wrested back the state of Madhya Pradesh from the jaws of defeat and emerged as the first Congress chief minister to serve a second term in the state, most Congressmen turned to him as the

le rung

symbol of a party on the revival.

Of course, Singh said all that was proper and attributed his victory to his party president: Sonia Gandhi. He enacted this act of gratitude on every television studio in town. And later, at the AICC session last December, he told an astonished crowd that his luck was in; and that his destiny told him that soon Sonia Gandhi would be the Prime Minister.

This was probably the first time Sonia Gandhi had been hailed as the future Prime Minister at an official forum; and most Congressmen on the dais fretted and fumed as Singh beat them to it.

Again, when Sonia gave in her resignation, Singh was the first chief minister to offer his resignation to her. Quick to seize the moment, he resigned late at night, the same evening that Sonia handed in her papers.

So, Singh is a sycophant. In Congress politics that's a merit. But what sets Singh apart from the others such as Natarwar Singh, Arjun Singh and Fotedar is that he is also a mass leader. After all, only six months ago, he delivered Madhya Pradesh to the Congress on a platter. And whatever Singh might pro-

fess, Sonia has acknowledged his role in the victory by letting him have a second term.

And Congressmen — maybe not at the CWC level, but at the party workers' level — acknowledge that Singh has a greater role to play at the Centre. In fact, when Sonia handed in her resignation, there were furtive attempts to look for a replacement. And while Manmohan Singh seemed the obvious choice, it was Digvijay who emerged as the most acceptable. Fortunately for Singh, the rumours never saw the light of day. Otherwise the coterie would have used that as an excuse to cut him down to size.

And unfortunately, he doesn't have many friends: for Singh has always played both sides. Take the time when Sharad Pawar had announced that he would contest the post of party president against Sitaram Kesri (June 1997). Singh assured both Kesri and Pawar that he was on their side thus ensuring that the middle path belonged to him.

Most people would get run over, walking the middle of the road. But not Digvijay Singh. He has just got ahead: both at the state and at the national level.

Madhavrao Scindia

As far as Sitaram Kesri was concerned, it was a moment of truth couched in a lie. After he withdrew support, first from the H.D. Deve Gowda government and later from the I.K. Gujral ministry, worried Congressmen would rush to his house at Purana Quila Road. Quite naturally they were apprehensive about the spectre of a mid-term poll. An unperturbed Kesri would soothe their fears and assure them that soon a Congress government would be in place.

When it was pointed out to him (very subtly) that no ally would support a Congress government with Kesri as Prime Minister, he would smile and tell them that he was not in the running for Race Course Road. His candidate for prime ministership was Madhavrao Scindia.

Of course, Kesri was lying. But, he also realised that while no one would support an old man in a hurry as the Prime Minister of India, Scindia's name would sell.

Despite the *havala* charges (later dismissed by the court) Scindia has a clean image. A testimony of this is the fact that he was one of the few who managed to win his seat as an Independent, after breaking away from the Congress before the 1996 Lok Sabha polls.

Others such as Arjun Singh and N.D. Tiwari were not so lucky. And those who claim that Digvijay had sabotaged



Scindia has a clean image. A testimony of this is the fact that he was one of the few who managed to win as an Independent after breaking away from the Congress in 1996

Arjun's election — well, it can be argued as to who the chief minister hates more: Arjun Singh or Scindia.

Ironically, Scindia did not fare so well during the 1998 polls — when he fought not as an Independent, but on a Congress ticket. Although he won, it was by a very narrow margin. This could be one of the reasons why he is considering changing his constituency from Gwalior to Guna. And though he has considerable influence over the old Gwalior state, his candidates did not fare well in the Assembly elections last year.

But it did not take Scindia long to recover lost ground. Those who scoffed and said that the Maharaja would be shifted out during the reshuffle at the general secretary level a few months ago, were in for an unpleasant surprise when Sonia not only kept him on, but gave him a free hand to first deal with the Orissa crisis (replacing J B Patnaik with Giridhar Gamang) and then to contain the exodus in Maharashtra after Pawar was expelled.

And, when you consider that Scindia's colleagues at the general secretary level consist of the likes of Pranab Mukherjee, R.K. Dhawan, Oscar Fernandes and Ghulam Nabi Azad — the savvy, young MP from Gwalior can only shine in comparison.

Rajesh Pilot

Last month, Rajesh Pilot went to one of the villages near Kargil and met the soldiers.

While he was there, a reporter commented that it was strange that the state PCC chief was not at hand to welcome a member of the high command — a Congress Working Committee member. Pilot laughed and retorted that in the Congress, they were all equals. And that there was no high command.

In a party that is so driven by hierarchy, it was a statement begging to be misinterpreted. The next day the papers reported that Pilot was questioning the existence of a high command within the Congress. And ever-willing Pilot batters pointed to the fact that when Sonia Gandhi wanted to send a team of observers to Kargil, she did not include his name in the list. (Not true, says Pilot claiming that he was out of town when the list was finalised).

Whatever the reason the omission was a glaring one. Pilot is an acknowledged expert on Kashmir affairs. In

fact, he is one of the few Congress leaders who has managed to carve out a niche for himself. He has three areas of specialisation: the north-east, Kashmir and the *kisan* (farmer) lobby.

While the insurgency-ridden states were an area that he adopted during his stint at the home ministry, Pilot has always identified strongly with the *kisan* lobby. In fact, journalists recall his annual *kisan* lunch where he serves *lassi* with *makki ki roti* and *sarson ka saag*, followed by fresh guavas as dessert. The only other Congressman who can claim to be a *kisan* leader is Balram Jakhar. And his popularity is diminishing. (The farmers' lobby gives Pilot unlimited access to both men and money near Delhi. And this always has its uses).

But, to be fair to Pilot, he does not need to manufacture any crowd for himself. However, the Gujjar leader has one major drawback: he has the mass on his side, but not the class. Party leaders see Pilot as an upstart, as an ambitious young man in a hurry. It does not matter who the Congress president is, Pilot

always manages to rub him or her the wrong way.

For example, during the CWC meeting that chose Sitaram Kesri as Narasimha Rao's successor, Pilot's was the lone voice of dissent. For obvious reasons this did not endear him to the then Congress president. Again, during the CWC meet when Sharad Pawar and P.A. Sangma raised the question of Sonia Gandhi's foreign birth, Pilot joined issue with them.

His honest but acerbic style of functioning has made him few friends within the ruling coterie. And as for the rebels, they claim that Pilot has let them down time and again. Though Pilot denies it, Pawar and Co. claim that he was one of the signatories to the now infamous letter that led to Sonia's resignation. Only he backed out at the last moment.

But this is how Pilot functions. He will raise the banner of revolt, only to hack out at the last — some would say, right — moment. Unfortunately, this has won him few friends within the party. For one, Pilot is never in any of the

Pilot's honest but acerbic style of functioning has made him few friends within the ruling coterie. And as for the rebels, they claim that he has let them down repeatedly



panels during a working committee election. Yet, at Tirupati he won on his own steam. And last year, in Calcutta, he lost by just one vote. And most concede that the only reason he lost was that the polls were rigged.

So, you may try, but you can't keep Rajesh Pilot down.

Sushma Swaraj

It is clear that she has her eye on the long term: otherwise why would Sushma Swaraj suddenly announce that she is not fighting the next Lok Sabha election? And that, instead of electoral politics she would rather dedicate her time to party affairs?

Unfortunately for Sushma, this was a transparent ploy. No one has asked her to reconsider her stance — yet. However, she has been given her share of time to organisational matters. Apart from addressing the occasional press briefing, she is also part of the BJP's high-level campaign committee chaired by L.K. Advani.

But she still has a long way to go before she can recover from her setback as chief minister of Delhi. First she antagonised the party leadership by refusing the job when it was offered to her. This did not go down well with the *parivar*, though most conceded that it was a losing battle to begin with.

And Sushma does not hesitate to blame her adversaries for her downfall. She has told friends that she holds Pramod Mahajan responsible for thrusting the Delhi chief ministership on her. Which is probably true. But it is also a pointer to Sushma's dwindling clout that Mahajan got away with it.

Later, when she could not deliver the expected miracle and lost the elections, she appeared before television cameras and said, "*Ghar mein aag, ghar ke churag se lagi.*" There was an angry and immediate reaction from both Madan Lal Khurana and Sahib Singh Verma — and a party that prided itself on conducting its battles behind closed doors suddenly faced the ignominy of having its fights being fought on the national network.

No wonder the Prime Minister refused to accommodate any of the three former CMs in the Cabinet expansion that followed. However, on the eve of the expansion, Sushma made it clear that she wanted her portfolios back. When she was asked which of the two seats she

would relinquish: Assembly or parliamentary, she took her party leaders by surprise when she said that she opted for the latter. The way she saw things, Delhi was already lost to the BJP before she took over as chief minister, so why should she do penance for something that was not her fault.

However, the *sangh parivar* did not see things that way.

But now, by opting out of the limelight and offering to do penance, she is

fast regaining lost ground. For one, she has wormed her way back into Advani's good books. (Initially Advani did not approve of the way she handled her defeat at the Delhi Assembly polls and later when she sulked just because she was denied her Cabinet portfolios.)

And of late, her credentials as a state leader have taken a beating — both in Delhi after she took on Khurana and in Haryana when the party broke off the alliance with the Haryana Vikas Party.



By opting out of the limelight and offering to do penance, Sushma Swaraj is fast regaining lost ground. She has wormed her way back into Advani's good books

(Sushma's husband Swaraj Kaushal holds a Rajya Sabha ticket from the HVP and she has a good equation with Bansilal. Unfortunately, she does not share the same rapport with Om Prakash Chautala. The Indian National Lok Dal leader prefers Khurana.)

However, this is but a temporary setback for someone with Sushma's skills: she is intelligent, she is articulate and has Advani on her side. As any BJP worker will tell you, that's a winning combination. And Sushma is ambitious enough to make it work.

when the party received a drubbing in Rajasthan. Govindacharya was asked to explain.

Rajasthan was followed by Bihar. The state leaders revolted against the imposition of Govindacharya's leadership from Delhi and he was asked to keep away from the state. A chastened Govindacharya returned to the capital where he said he would keep off party matters and stick to ideology.

But his stint in the wilderness did not last long. Soon, he was rehabilitated to solve the crisis in Uttar Pradesh. And he

sing from his little room at the party headquarters. And if it hurts that the man he is trying to sell to the public is the very same person he had dismissed as a *mukhauta* some time ago, he is mature enough not to show it — in public at least. Instead, he is content to consolidate his hold over the organisation.

For, he has realised that the compulsions of coalition politics are such that he would have to put his own ideology on the back burner for a while. He was against the opening up of the insurance sector, for instance. But there was little he could do at the BJP national executive in January this year, when the Prime Minister had his way.

In fact, Govindacharya has more often than not, appeared on television and defended the government's point of view (these are not necessarily his own views). For instance, at the BJP executive in Goa, it was he who briefed the press about the government's economic policies — which did not quite coincide with the S. Gurumurthy school of thought.

But the articulate general secretary has one advantage over his peers: both Sushma Swaraj and Pramod Mahajan have angered the *parivar* because of their personal political ambitions. Govindacharya has made it clear that the only post he is interested in, lies within the party.

Pramod Mahajan

Last fortnight, there was an informal meeting of the Congress think-tank. First they spoke about Kargil and the intelligence failure on behalf of the government. Then there was much criticism about the ban on PTV. After which the talk moved on to the government's monopoly over the Doordarshan news bulletins. "Even we were never like this," swore a working committee member.

Interestingly, the blame for two out of the three points that were raised at this meeting lies squarely at Pramod Mahajan's door. But he is not apologetic about it. The information and broadcasting minister has even written an editorial in a national daily defending his stand with a jingoism that would go down well with the RSS. And so what if the secular elite has an objection? That's not Mahajan's constituency in the first place. The RSS, however, is. He knows that he has to shore up his image with those who matter in the *sangh parivar*.



K.N. Govindacharya

Party ideologue and think-tank, Govindacharya also has the *sangh parivar*'s equivalent of nobility on his side: he has no interest in electoral politics. Which of course, does not mean that he lacks ambition. Only, in his case, his ambition does not extend to Race Course Road, but is restricted to the headquarters at Keshav Kunj.

While Govindacharya is another of L.K. Advani's proteges, and hence destined for greatness, he suffered a setback when his *bete noire* Khashabhai Thakre became party president. And Thakre did his best to eclipse Govindacharya.

During the Assembly elections, he packed Govindacharya off to Rajasthan — a state that the party was sure to lose, and told him to keep off Madhya Pradesh (at that time the BJP thought it would topple Digvijay Singh). And

As part of the party's campaign committee, Govindacharya is doing something that comes naturally to him: strategising from his little room at the party headquarters

succeeded in curtailing the rebellion against Kalyan Singh. A triumphant Govindacharya returned to Delhi, his self-deprecatory smile back in place.

As part of the party's campaign committee, Govindacharya is doing something that comes naturally to him: strategi-



Pramod Mahajan: gets his message across

That's easier said than done. Unlike the rigid and austere leaders at Keshav Kunj, Mahajan loves the limelight. He enjoys his role as the spokesman for the Cabinet: he delights in addressing the press in his brand new *achkan*. In fact, Mahajan has turned the simple exercise of a press briefing into an art.

Currently his stock is high. The situation in Maharashtra has worked to his advantage. With Sharad Pawar's revolt, the BJP-Sena alliance is in a position to consolidate its hold over Maharashtra, while barely two months ago, most had written off the alliance. And, when that happens, Mahajan will reap the reward.

But things have not always been so good. Last year, when he lost his seat at the Lok Sabha polls, he returned to Delhi friendless and jobless. He had successfully antagonised his former mentor Advani. But the party did not have an outright majority in the House. And Mahajan's particular brand of talent was needed to add up the numbers.

After the government was in place, Atal Behari Vajpayee decided to make Mahajan's position as the party's troubleshooter into an official one: he was appointed political adviser to the Prime Minister. In this position, he enjoyed both patronage and power.

As I&B minister, Mahajan has ensured that he stays in the limelight. If he is not addressing a press briefing, then he is either inaugurating a new channel (anyone remember the sports channel?) or else giving cricket commentary.

The party puts up with his pranks because he also serves a useful purpose: as a strategist and as someone who is articulate enough to get the message across to the people. What has also helped is that he has risen from the ranks. He may be flamboyant but he doesn't stray too far from party ideology. In the long run, it is this that matters. And not how many new channels he can gift to the party on Independence Day.

Mahajan's greatest asset in the party is that there is actually a group in the BJP which considers him its leader. The downside of this is that everyone notices this and these people are seen as Mahajan's ginger group to further his career prospects. To say that Mahajan is a careerist is too harsh a judgement. But certainly he has his sights fixed on the top job: and there are others who believe he has the qualifications to secure it, when the chance comes. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

*The Pakistani
withdrawal in
Kashmir unifies the
sangh parivar*

Battles are normally inserts in a war. Important side-stories that also have the potential to become weighty milestones. But at best, a battle won is just a small step in the war at hand. That, at least, is what conventional warfare and the Queen's English tell us.

For all the sleepless nights over the battles in Kargil, Dras and Batalik sectors they might have undergone, senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders are far from a tired lot. In fact, if the mood in the party is any indication, this time the leadership is more assured than their representatives in the government were when the conflict first broke out in May.

There is no denying that for the BJP the Pakistani withdrawal on the battlefield could not have come at a better time. Yet, there is an element of uncertainty on whether the party will be able to pull it all together. The stakes are undoubtedly high; probably for some, it is even higher than the conflict with Pakistan. Because at stake is not just one electoral victory. Rather, the results would go a long way in resolving the major 'fault line' in the *sangh parivar*.

When the Vajpayee government assumed office in March last year, the executive was seen as just an extension of the Nagpur secretariat that functioned either from Keshav Kunj in the capital or from the party headquarters at Ashoka Road. At most, it could also occasionally function from the North Block but not without some invitees from the other two offices. Those in the government came to the party office to attend meetings — if at all they came.

That has changed dramatically. Today, the members of the all-powerful Central Election Committee, consisting of the powerful apparatchik, have little problem in heading for the PMO at 7, Race Course Road. They are also not apologetic in explaining that "security is a problem with the Prime Minister".

Party leaders are also not bashful in declaring that Atal Behari Vajpayee is

**Atal Behari Vajpayee: emerging
as the mascot**

A HAPPY FAMILY



PRADIP SANYAL

the most important mascot in the party's campaign. State, as much as the party, shall not make an "issue out of Kargil" — there is no escaping that. If that is the case, then the BJP has little option but to project Vajpayee as the man of the hour. According to party general secretary M. Venkaiah Naidu, "He is the most important and capable man in India today and we shall spare no efforts to campaign about this."

The script, however, has not rolled to perfection. There is little doubt that the resolution of the conflict has caught the party leadership by surprise. It has reflected the second mistake of the BJP leadership in gauging Pakistani response. The first time, they had expected the neighbouring country to get shell-shocked by the nuclear explosions. This time, they expected another act of bravado from Nawaz Sharif. Though caught off guard, the leadership has been careful in refraining from noisy celebrations like it did in May last year.

Though BJP sources assert that the *sangathan* has been active throughout the Kargil episode and cite numerous camps, meetings and campaign trails to buttress their claims, the affirmation runs thin, given the impression that the party is starting from scratch once again. "It is natural that we have to reorient our strategy as matters have undergone a tremendous change since the fall of the government," points out a senior BJP leader.

But the Vajpayee camp would argue that little has changed. After all, despite "problems" with him, there was no option for the hardliners within the *sangh parivar* but to project Vajpayee as the main mascot. The conflict with Pakistan has only made the issue sharper than before and closed the door on whatever option the hardliners might have had. In fact, while the debate in political circles might be raging for a while on who has gained more, one issue that has been decided is the battle within the *sangh parivar*. The one person who has gained the most is Vajpayee. It is evident that this mascot is no mask for now.

But having resolved its inner dilemma, this is where the *sangh parivar* now prepares to close its ranks and launch the next assault. Knowing that Vajpayee on his own simply has neither the organisational steel nor style, the RSS has to launch an all-out offensive to grab whatever it can. True, the organisation expects little leeway in the event of the



L.K. Advani: old battle-hand

BJP getting another chance to lead another coalition. But, it obviously believes in the proverbial theory that a bird in hand is better.

Over the next few weeks, the BJP leadership will have to decide whether to project Vajpayee and his ability as the sole election issue or to enter the

The Pakistani withdrawal could not have come at a better time for the BJP. At stake is not just one electoral victory. Rather, the results would go a long way in resolving the major 'fault line' in the *sangh parivar*

electoral fray with a number of issues of which Vajpayee is an important one. This is of vital importance as leaders argue that if the issue is decided in Vajpayee's favour, traditional questions like candidate selection and caste equations are not going to be of so much relevance. "We have to decide whether we are going to try for a wave situation or not," says a party leader.

Of paramount importance would be the feedback from the constituency-level conferences that the BJP has been holding for some weeks now. The most significant directive issued to state units during the party deliberations in the aftermath of the resolution of the conflict with Pakistan is that these conferences must not only be wound up by the first week of August, but district-level leaders should also send in detailed reports reflecting the mood of the constituency.

Between now and early August, when the Election Commission is likely to have finalised the electioneering schedule, the party apparatus has several things on hand. The party knows that charisma, however big, cannot drive a campaign. Which is why old battle-hand L.K. Advani is at the helm of affairs in the central campaign committee that has drawn several talented leaders like Arun Jantley who had been at odds with the leadership for quite a while.

On his part, neither Vajpayee nor any of his camp followers are going to meddle much while formulating the nitty-gritty of the campaign. Uneasy though the past might have been, there is greater understanding of each other's strengths than before and this is reflected even in personal initiatives of senior RSS leaders who are quick to chasten the cadre for any criticism levelled at Vajpayee.

When the BJP-led coalition was defeated in Parliament, the party was stunned into silence. That silence broke only when the big guns started booming in Kargil. Now, as the party prepares for one of the most decisive electoral battles, it is evident that it is going to spare no big guns in its attempt. The message from the party headquarters is that this is no time for taking pot shots at each other. Says a BJP source: "We know that if there are problems within, then we will end up defeating ourselves. Other issues can be sorted out later." It matters little that by then it might be too late. •

Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay/New Delhi

No Minor Matter

The NCM wants 100 Lok Sabha seats reserved for minorities

As political parties prepare to gear themselves up for the Lok Sabha elections, they've been thrown into a tizzy by an unexpected demand from unexpected quarters. The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has sought reservation of 100 Lok Sabha seats for minorities. The argument is that minorities — Muslims, Christians and other religious communities — are under-represented in Parliament and state Assemblies and that the seats held by them should be proportional to their population.

The two mainstream political parties, the Congress and the BJP, have rejected the commission's move outright. NCM chairman Dr Tahir Mahmood considers this an insult to the commission. "The commission is a quasi-judicial statutory body. It does not need lessons in the Constitution from the Congress which

seems to remember the Constitution only when there is talk of minority rights," he says.

The NCM's demand for reservation coincides with similar demands from political groups representing minorities in several parts of the country. In Andhra Pradesh, the Muslim Representation Movement (MRM) has demanded 15 per cent reservation for Muslims in legislative bodies including the Lok Sabha. In the north, in UP, the Meerut-based Muslim Jagrukta Forum, launched by one Shaheen Parvez, has also voiced a similar demand. And at the apex, the four Muslim parties — the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, the Jamate-e-Ulema Hind, the Milli Council and the Majlis-e-Mushawarat, including the expelled leaders of the National Conference, like Prof. Saifuddin Soz — have prepared a document on the problems of Muslims. In this they support the NCM's demand

Tahir Mahmood's recommendation has surprised even Muslim groups who are not sure if their community is ready for a measure as radical as this



As they say, "We want just representation according to the minorities' proportion to the total population. There are 29 members in the Lok Sabha whereas, in proportion to their population, their number should be 81."

It is a fact that Muslim representation in the Lok Sabha has not crossed the 50 mark. In the first Lok Sabha their number was 36, in the second it was 24. And in the last Lok Sabha there were just 26 Muslim MPs. Representation of other minorities is so negligible that it doesn't count.

The question of Muslim representation is directly linked to their sociocultural attitudes and the leadership at the lowest levels. Although the Muslim intelligentsia is content to demand constitutional amendments to ensure the numbers, it has not meaningfully addressed itself to issues of religious reform and education, the real problems before the community.

This is exactly what the British capitalised on in 1909. The Simla Deputation, consisting of 35 feudal and elite Muslims, took a representation to Lord Minto seeking reservation. Although



was then headed by M.H. Beg, sought to abolish the NCM and replace it with a 'National Integration cum Human Rights Commission' with various sub-committees including one on the problems of the minorities.

The Beg Report also said: "Setting up a Human Rights Commission would avoid competition between political parties in an attempt to expose or champion the cause of minorities, whether reasonable or unreasonable, for catching their votes. Such competition certainly tended to increase divisiveness in the nation rather than promote national interest."

Till its 12th annual report, this was part of the commission's stand. It was withdrawn in 1990 and in 1992, P.V. Narasimha Rao gave it statutory status.

Forty districts in the country have been declared minority districts (13 in UP, eight in West Bengal, five in Kerala). The real minority in the country, if the concept is applied properly, are the Parsis. They are 0.1 per cent of India's population. But in terms of their ratio to the population, it makes their influence negligible.

The Muslims are more than 90 per cent in eight districts and in five they are 50 to 70 per cent. In 29 districts they form 20 to 49 per cent of the population. But there are some significant facts

these individuals had a standing in their community, they had no mass base. So no one took them seriously except Minto, who conceded their demand as 'genuine' and, as a result, introduced communal representation in the Act of 1909.

Tahir Mahmood's recommendation has surprised even Muslim groups who are not sure if their community is ready for something as radical as this measure. The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) has supported the NCM. But other groups are a little wary of the suggestion.

What do Muslims in India really feel about the suggestion that they should have constituencies which should send only Muslims to the Lok Sabha? Many feel it is a spurious debate and is just another way of acknowledging the 'two-nation' theory.

The theory, which provided the ideological and theoretical underpinnings for the Partition and the creation of Pakistan, argued that Hindus and Muslims form separate cultures and civilisations. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's

It's a fact that Muslim representation in the Lok Sabha has not crossed the 50 mark. In the first Lok Sabha their number was 36. In the second it was 24. And in the last Lok Sabha there were just 26 Muslim MPs

'Game of Dice' theory argued that "Muslims would come under Hindu domination because of their fewer numbers. It would be like a game of dice in which one man had four dice and the other, one."

It is hard to see how the NCM's argument is different from this one. And also how far it has come from the original purpose for which it was set up. It was first constituted in 1978 by the Janata Party government for the 'welfare of the minorities'.

However, when voices of dissent arose from within the government of the day itself questioning the rationale behind the constitution of a separate body for the minorities, there was a rethinking on the role of the NCM. The fourth report of the commission, which

about the growth and development of Muslim society. The rate of growth of a middle class is slow. Whether this is accompanied by a progressive impoverishment of the poor is not clear. There is insufficient data about their socio-economic conditions. The drop-out rate in education is high. Among all the ulema-run institutions, *madrasas*, i.e. schools for children, dominate.

Tahir Mahmood's suggestions have not found favour with non-BJP political parties for obvious reasons: you can do minority vote-bank politics only if you keep Muslims encumbered by the weight of their own backwardness. However, it is a suggestion which calls for a debate on policies towards the minorities. •

Rakesh Sinha/New Delhi

Going competitive

Doordarshan's hourly news channel is a step in the right direction



It is good that the Prasar Bharati has decided to launch a news channel which will give hourly news and current affairs programmes for Doordarshan viewers.

This channel is being launched to give a competition to satellite news channels as this one is also going to be on satellite PAS 4 and cable operators will be told to include it in their package.

According to plans, news will be produced by Doordarshan staffers who were sitting without work for the last three years. In fact, certain private producers had taken advantage of DD's set-up, network and hardware to produce special programmes. Now, the Prasar Bharati will give all these facilities to its staff members to produce news.

It will definitely be the most challenging task for Doordarshan officials as there is tremendous competition in the area of news. There are certain disadvantages with DD. For example, the credibility of DD news in the past has been low as it is considered to be the government's mouthpiece. The new channel will have to create a balance in the treatment of news. Secondly, the DD staff will have to work like private producers.

People like Prannoy Roy have proved that producing news is not an easy task. Their coverage of Kargil is an eye-opener for all news producers. The way Roy's correspondents risked their lives is commendable. Doordarshan also will have to match its news quality with the STAR News.

Though several news producers are making national news, it is completely Delhi-centric and full of political footage. There is no hard work into it. When 24-hours news is available, why should people watch single-bulletin news?

Actually the team of Pramod Mahajan, Piyush Mankad and Rajiv Ratan Shah has taken a bold step to launch a news channel in such a short time. If DD officials work sincerely, they can produ-



Pramod Mahajan's team has taken a bold initiative to launch a news channel in a short time. If DD officials work sincerely they can produce real national news giving coverage to all the states

ce real national news giving coverage to all the states instead of filling it purely from Delhi showing politicians' speeches, seminars, inaugurations and press conferences.

This team is also trying to revamp DD Metro by improving its programme quality. There was a time when getting a slot on DD 2 was difficult. Later, when telecast fee was increased unrealistically, most of the good producers ran away and the quality of programmes went down. Now slots on DD 2 are easily available. DD 2 can still attract many a viewer if it is converted into an entertainment channel with 20 per cent programmes on current affairs.

The Prasar Bharati has already launched a sports channel which is a step in the right direction. Today sports coverage

has got maximum money and if DD runs a quality sports channel, it can make a lot of money to feed its other channels.

There is also a plan to launch an elite channel of Doordarshan. Here I would like to warn Mahajan, Mankad and Shah. If this exercise is also going to be like DD 3 in which a number of pseudo-intellectuals were involved, then it will also meet the same fate as DD 3. People want to watch both Shah Rukh Khan and Amjad Ali Khan and not only Amjad Ali.

Now the CEO of Prasar Bharati will have to ensure that DD's reception improve considerably. Enough pressure should be mounted on cable operators to take DD signals also through the satellite dish. It is good that Shah has written to all district magistrates to pressurise cable operators. •

All of Reddy's men

Rival factions of the Andhra Pradesh Congress clash again

Well, well, well, it's the 'sticks and stones will break my bones' time again. And soda bottles too — a favourite missile with Andhra Pradesh Congressmen. Though dates for Assembly elections in the state have not been declared as yet, it's widely believed that they'll be held along with the Lok Sabha polls starting 4 September. So the jostling has begun, figuratively and *figure*-atively, so to speak. With a very loud and gala opening at Jaggaiahpet on 10 July.

It started right in the morning. APCC president Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy was scheduled to address a public meeting at various places in the Jaggaiahpet Assembly constituency and local Congressmen were preparing for his arrival. Except, as is the wont with the Congress, there were two rival contenders for the party ticket — K. Seshagiri Rao and S. Udayabhanu who also happens to be the APCC secretary. Obviously, both were desperate to make an impression on YSR.

In the Congress Party, it works like this: those who dominate in the setting of the stage for the public meeting, get to dominate the entire proceedings. So inevitably, both Udayabhanu's men and Seshagiri's men wanted to carry the sticks and lay the tables and fill the glasses and the like. And equally inevitably, they clashed.

Rather violently, as it happened. Soda bottles flew with abandon, cars were smashed, tables upturned, heads bashed and, at a certain stage, the proceedings became a little indiscriminate so that hapless villagers, caught at the wrong end of hand-launched missiles, ran for their lives.

So that by the time the APCC president's convoy reached Jaggaiahpet crossroads (with Dronamraju Satyanarayana and P. Upendra who jumped from the TDP to the BJP and then to the Congress), he was greeted by Seshagiri Rao's men holding their bleeding heads in their hands.

Having heard their complaint, an enraged YSR ticked off K. Udayabhanu rather severely, told his men to behave and got the injured taken to the hospital.



Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy (centre): can't keep his house in order

It was also sadly clear to the APCC president that he couldn't very well hold a public meeting among upturned furniture and broken pieces of glass decorating grounds. So he decided to talk to this voting public some other time and moved on to the next village for his scheduled address.

Now it's not always a good idea to tell Congressmen to behave. They tend to react in exactly the opposite manner. Angry over the unjust admonition of their leader — after all both parties were equally involved in the squabble — Udayabhanu's supporters followed YSR's convoy, pelting stones on it. Things got a bit more serious at Chilla-kallu when some of them tried to snatch the 9 mm from Upendra's bodyguard and stab him. He had to fire four rounds in the air to dispel the mob. By the time that episode of stone pelting etc., was over, two press photographers had joined the list of injured.

Later, two separate groups — the Youth Congress and the Congress — cla-

shed at Ibrahimpatnam over the garlanding of late V. Mohan Ranga Rao's statue. Black humour there perhaps, since Ranga Rao, a violent Congressman himself, had met a violent death.

All in all, it was a memorable day for Rajasekhara Reddy. His own men at each other's throats and a public spectacle of the dissensions in the Congress that's intensifying as elections approach.

The Telugu Desam Party is not gung ho, but it's not on a very back wicket either. Chief minister Chandrababu Naidu has done well and has serious hopes of a comeback — his main obstacle being a resurgent Congress. Reddy's biggest problem is holding his men together. He has tried to stem such future exhibitions by suspending both squabbling leaders from the Congress for six years — a very stiff sentence indeed.

Yet, that fear remains — will Congressmen stop fighting each other long enough to find time to fight the TDP? •

Sarita Rani/Hyderabad

Toothless tiger

There is an urgent need to make the Lokayukt more effective

How does the Lokayukt of Madhya Pradesh feel about his own office? It is a toothless tiger, points out Justice Faizanuddin, in the preface of the 16th report of Madhya Pradesh Lokayukt Upalokayukt — 1997-98. In order to make the office more effective, Justice Faizanuddin says he wants more power to curb corruption. And if this cannot be done, there is no point in keeping the institution alive. The root cause of corruption is the powerful nexus of politicians-bureaucrats and criminals, Faizanuddin says ruefully.

In Madhya Pradesh, every year the Lokayukt is flooded with complaints against the elite community of IAS, IPS and IFS (Indian Forest Service) and the number of complaints are on the rise. Add to this the number of politicians. But the Lokayukt cannot initiate action against these reported offenders. It can only recommend. In fact, irrespective of these recommendations, the sanction for prosecution of offenders is granted by the government.

The figures speak for themselves. Between 1 April, 1997 to 31 March, 1998, the Lokayukt in Madhya Pradesh got as many as 36 complaints against ministers and the chief minister. The maximum number of complaints (61) were made against the elite IAS officers, followed by 23 each against IPS and IFS officers. Of the 36 cases of complaints against politicians, 17 were rejected while 19 were registered for further investigation. There were two cases where the Lokayukt sent its report to the government.

Similarly, of the 61 cases of corruption involving IAS officers, 38 were filed after initial investigations while 23 were registered for further probe. There

were two cases where the Lokayukt sent its report to the government and in only one case did it ask for sanction for prosecution. In case of IPS and IFS officers, 15 and 14 cases respectively were filed after initial investigations while further probes were initiated against eight IPS and nine IFS officers.

In the year 1997-98, the special police of Lokayukt investigated 516 cases. Most importantly, there were 188 cases where the Lokayukt had asked for sanction to prosecute from the government. Sanction was granted in 142 cases of corruption. By the end of the financial year, 46 cases were still pending.

"The number of cases where sanctions were granted may look more but the cases where sanction was not granted were the most important ones including those involving ministers and IAS Governor Bhai Mahavir: not a mere rubber stamp



officers," point out Lokayukt sources. And this has been one of the reasons why Justice Faizanuddin — who is a former Supreme Court judge — feels frustrated.

There seems to be a difference of perception so far as the purview of Lokayukt is concerned. IAS officers feel that they don't come under the institution. The IAS association in Madhya Pradesh has filed a petition in the High Court, dragging the government and the Lokayukt to the court. IAS officers contend that they belong to an all-India service and are not governed by the state. Their terms and service conditions show that they are controlled by the central government while the institution of Lokayukt is established by the state.

In its reply, the Lokayukt has pointed out that the IAS cadre does come under its purview. "They certainly come under the Act. We have explained all the legal and constitutional positions. They cannot be excluded," point out Lokayukt sources. The case is due to come up for hearing in the High Court.



Chief minister Digvijay Singh: shielding his bureaucrats?

In the middle of this differing positions has come a remark made by the state Bharatiya Janata Party president Nand Kumar Sar who observed that a large number of IAS officers were corrupt. Sar has shot off a letter to Union home minister L K Advani, requesting him to investigate the matter. According to Sar, "A large number of IAS officers in Madhya Pradesh own land around almost all the big towns of the state."

Governor of Madhya Pradesh, Bhai Mahavir, has reportedly gone through the latest Lokayukt report. According to sources, he has agreed with certain points raised by Justice Faizanuddin. In fact, last year, the Governor had shown interest on the issue of sanction for prosecution of some tainted ministers belonging to the Digvijay Singh Cabinet. The Governor then had refused to act as a mere "rubber stamp".

Chief minister Digvijay Singh, however, feels that it is wrong to say that sanctions for prosecution were not given. In a letter to Justice Faizanuddin,

There seems to be a difference of perception on the Lokayukt's purview. IAS officers feel that the Lokayukt cannot pull them up. Lokayukt sources disagree. "They certainly come under the Act and cannot be excluded," they say

the chief minister says: "But for some exceptional cases, sanctions for prosecution is generally granted. Since the establishment of Lokayukt till 1997-98, prosecution was recommended in 1,762 cases; of these, sanction was granted in 1,709 cases. There were 46 pending cases and in seven cases the government did not agree with the Lokayukt and sanction was not granted..."

How does Justice Faizanuddin feel about all these? After his retirement from Supreme Court, he joined as the Lokayukt of Madhya Pradesh in March, 1997. A soft-spoken man, Faizanuddin

usually avoids the media. "Corruption has gone up during the last 50 years...It won't be an exaggeration to say that for some people, sitting on high posts has become a profitable business," feels Faizanuddin.

The Lokayukt report has raised a number of disturbing questions. The report feels that it has now become necessary to ask as to why even after a decade and a half of its inception, the Lokayukt has not been able to curb corruption? The reason, according to the report, is clear. First of all, the Lokayukt and the Upalokayukt have no power to initiate action against a public servant even if charges of corruption are established. They can merely send their recommendation to the competent officer and it depends on the officer whether or not to initiate action. Which is why the work done by the Lokayukt does not become effective.

Moreover, even if the charges are proved during investigation under the Bhrashtachar Nivaran Adhiniyam, a case cannot be filed in court against the errant public servant without the government's permission and the government sometimes uses its right to save the accused.

A Lokayukt is usually a retired High Court judge or Supreme Court judge. If he finds a prima facie case of corruption against a public servant but the sanction

to prosecute is not given, the very purpose behind setting up Lokayukt is defeated. There is a need to remove the inadequacies and the sooner they are done the better. In fact, detailed proposals on the amendments to be made in the Lokayukt and Upalokayukt Act were sent to the authorities in October 1995. Needless to say, the matter remains in the cold storage till date.

And even as status quo is maintained, the politician-bureaucrat-criminal nexus go about ripping off people. There seems to be no forum for redressal. •

Deshdeep Saxena/Bhopal

MAN OF THE MOMENT

Kapil Dev has charisma, mass appeal and now, an issue

I think everyone knows what happened in the last month and a half. Me and Ajay went to Srinagar and saw a couple of things we didn't digest too easily.

Last fortnight, Kapil Dev and Ajay Jadeja did visit the *jawans* at the hospital in Srinagar. When they reached the hospital, both the national icons felt a bit foolish. Here they were face to face with the real heroes; and instead, the recuperating *jawans* were treating the cricketers as demigods. "Ajay kept pushing me forward, and I kept telling him, 'No beta, it's you they want to see. You go first'," recalls Dev. Adding, "I think both of us were very nervous."

After that encounter, Dev was a changed man. Or at least his views on cricket had changed.

In Srinagar itself, he came out with his now infamous policy statement on cricket. According to the former Indian captain, while India was fighting Pakistan in Kargil the two countries should not play cricket together.

The Shiv Sena supremo, Bal Thackeray, was the first to welcome Dev's statement saying that this was something he had been reiterating all along. While not many had agreed with Thackeray, most Indians supported Dev's stand.

A somewhat embarrassed Dev then had to explain why he had not endorsed Thackeray's stand when the Shiv Sena chief had made the same suggestion in November last year. "At that time there was no war," was the best the former cricketer could come up with.

Another fallout of Dev's 'no cricket with Pakistan' rhetoric was that the Sahara India Pariwar immediately can-

celled the Sahara Cup that was scheduled for September this year. (Incidentally, Dev is a director-worker with the Sahara Group).

Quick to cash in on the publicity, the group roped in Dev as its official spokesman to announce various Kargil Benefit schemes, such as the football match between cricketers and film stars. Unfortunately for the Pariwar, there were more questions about Dev's embargo on cricket with Pakistan, than there were queries about Sahara's role in the football match.

And poor Kapil soon realised the enormity of his remark. When he was asked whether the Sahara Cup could still be held, since the infiltrators would probably withdraw by September, he retorted that his was a spontaneous remark. And that it was not his place to decide the cricketing policy of the country, since he was neither a member of the cricket board, nor a politician.

But this could change.

During the World Cup, it was Dev's *bete noire* Sunil Gavaskar who manned the mikes in England, while the former Test bowler sold refrigerators on the Indian screens during the commercial breaks. But, the minute he returned from London, Dev went to Srinagar and suddenly he was on all the television channels.

What if the issue links him with someone like Bal Thackeray. Dev is on record saying that he respects Thackeray

And this time it was not as a filler during the commercial breaks. Kapil Dev became *the event*. His views were quoted liberally in all the morning papers; and during the evenings he was there, in the television studios, earnestly explaining his stand.

Quick to seize on the man of the moment, suddenly various political parties made a beeline for Kapil Dev; Lok Sabha tickets in hand.

Although he is still to come out with his future plans — for the time being he is content to reiterate that his was not a political statement, but an emotional reaction — his friends recall a time when Dev had shown an inclination to become a member of the Rajya Sabha. Although both the BJP and the Congress would have been only too happy to accommodate him, Dev apparently preferred a nomination from the President's quota.

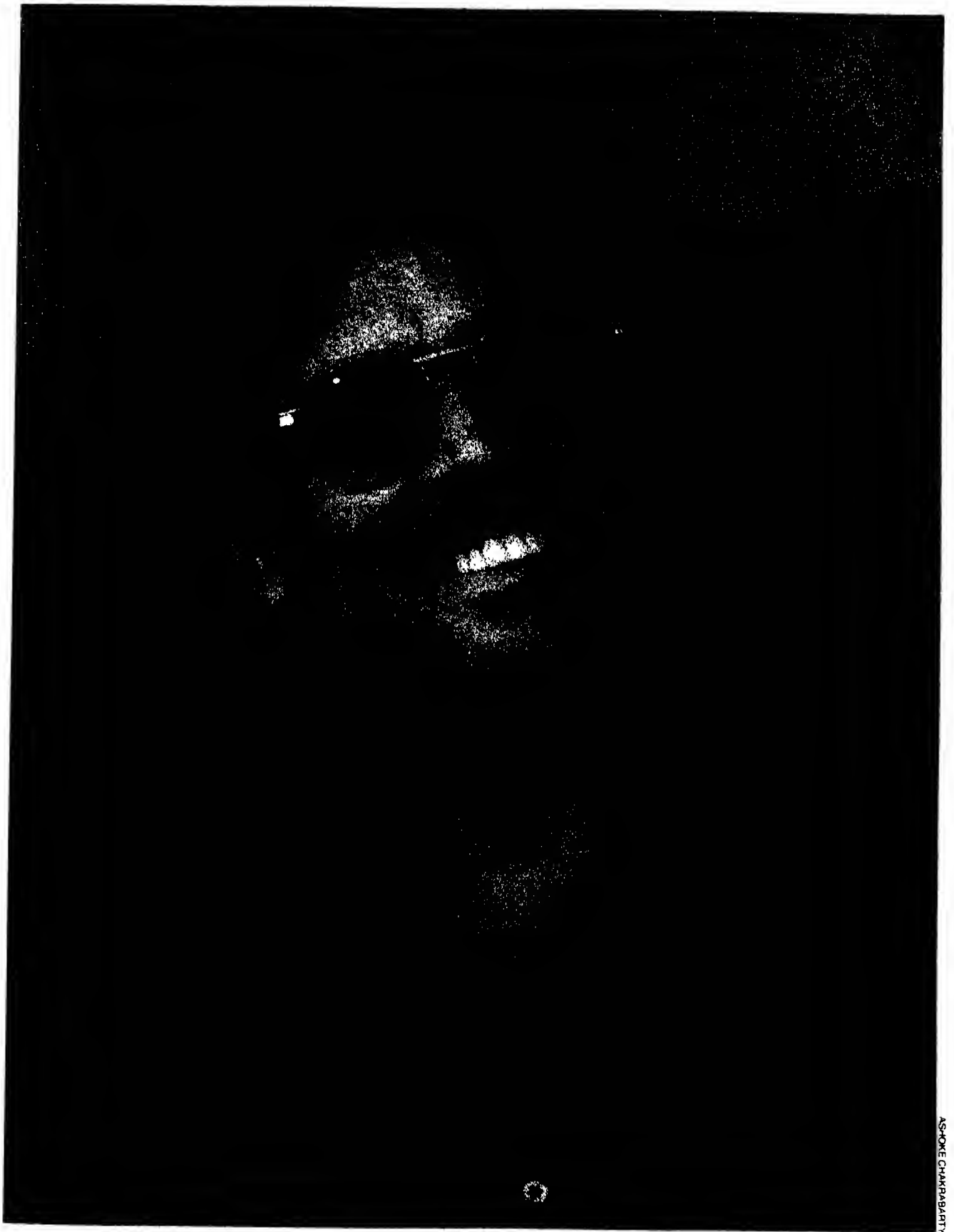
But now his popularity is at an all-time high. Even Ajay Jadeja has had his share of offers. But, while Jadeja still has a cricketing career in front of him, Dev is in a position to take up a stint in politics. And he will probably win his seat.

After all, he has what it takes: charisma, mass appeal and now, an issue. (So what if the issue links him with someone like Bal Thackeray. Dev is on record saying that he respects Thackeray).

But anyway, it is in Dev's favour that while most secularists scoffed at Thackeray when he spoke against playing cricket with Pakistan, the former cricketer's plea has gone down well with the rank and file of the country. Which just goes to show that you don't have to merely say the right thing, you also have to choose the right time. And have the right image. And in politics, a credible image can win you half the battle.

Dev, however, has ruled out joining politics. He says that he is not in this for any personal gain. His effort to raise money for Kargil is not a cheap publicity gimmick, but a spontaneous reaction to the suffering and sacrifices of the soldiers at the front. In fact, he is quite categorical in stating that he does not want to talk about himself.

He would rather talk about Kargil or else, the Sahara Pariwar's efforts to contribute to the Army Welfare Fund. That, according to him, is the need of the moment, the rest can wait. •



ASHOKE CHAKRABARTY

"I hope this shows that Indians can be world-beaters"

Leander Paes on Wimbledon, the Tour, and life outside tennis

INTERVIEWED BY SUMIT DAS GUPTA/LONDON

Scene 1: 3.12 pm, 4th July, Court No. 1. Leander Paes smashes an overhead between Paul Haarhuis and Jared Palmer. It's 'Game, Set, Match and Championship' to Mahesh Bhupathi and Leander Paes'.

Scene 2: 8.46 pm, 4th July, Centre Court. Leander Paes serves an ace on match point versus Jonas Bjorkman and Anna Kournikova. It's 'Game, Set, Match and Championship' to Lisa Raymond and Leander Paes'.

After one semi-final (mixed doubles) and two finals, after 323 minutes on court, after 91 gruelling games, Leander Paes had ensured that the last day of the last Wimbledon of the millennium would be remembered for the American invasion (Pete Sampras and Lindsay Davenport), and an Indian revolution.

"It's such a huge day, a history-making day for Lea, for Mahesh, and for Indian tennis. It's sensational. And I'm so proud of him," was the emotional response of Paes's normally hard as 'Nails' coach, Bob Carmichael, a little later.

A couple of hours after winning his second Wimbledon title in a day, and pocketing a thoroughly well-earned

Leander Paes with Lisa Raymond: "One of my dreams was to play on Centre Court...this is just fantastic"



265,600 pounds (186,420 for the men's doubles and 79,180 for the mixed doubles), an exhausted but elated Leander Paes sat down to have an exclusive chat with SUNDAY. Excerpts:

SUNDAY: Congratulations! The longest and biggest day of your career?

Leander Paes: (Smiles) Yah, mate, one of the longest two days! I have had three matches yesterday, three matches today and I'm pretty much dead beat. But it's been a fun two weeks. One of my dreams was to play on Centre Court here and now I've done it twice in one day, which is just fantastic.

Q: How would you describe the way you feel now?

A: Jesus, it's just one of the best days of my life for sure. Frejus, which was something like this, long, very emotional Davis Cup matches over three days; the Olympics, which was such a dream come true for me, my family, and for the entire country; and today. These have been the three best...As a little boy one had dreams of being here, and now standing here...it's a feeling of accomplishment. It's taken years and years of bloody hard work and pondering over decisions and where money will come from and this and that... But when you're there in the third set or fifth set, when your back's hurting, or your hamstring's giving you trouble, nothing else matters. It's the mind that takes over. These last two days, it's just been mind over matter.

Q: The moment after winning the men's doubles was obviously a special one...

A: Exactly. After match point, we just looked at each other and paused, just looking at each other for a long time...It takes a lot of guts, you know, and hard work to win something like this. Especially when it's not your favourite surface. I don't think we both believed that we could win it at Wimbledon. Just having done that, overcoming the obstacles and hurdles to get here just shows such a tremendous belief in each other and ourselves.

Q: Who are the people who come to mind at this emotional moment?

A: Well obviously for me it's my folks, my family, my girl-

AFP



Paes and Bhupathi with the Wimbledon trophy

friend and my coach, who are with me. And I saw Sir Naresh, my first Davis Cup captain, in tears today...he gave me my first break, he's the one who put in the doubles against Japan, and today...

Q: Does this change things, as a player and as a person?

A: It doesn't really change anything. It just makes me a more accomplished tennis player. I'm the same human being as I was before today. It just gives me a whole lot more confidence. I think it'll change Mahesh a lot more than it would change me as a tennis player. The amount of confidence that he'll get from the month of tennis that we've played at the French and here, is just mind boggling. And that's something that I hope that he's going to realise.

Q: But this is an enormous step forward in your desire to rule the doubles tour.

A: Yes. That's my goal, to dominate the doubles circuit. We are in a position to do it and we would be fools to throw it away just because of niggling problems. Off the court, there are influences that are negative, that have to be kept away for our tennis, for our growth as a team, but mainly for our friendship. But this is a big rejuvenating point in our career. These two wins, this month, will help us a lot.

Q: What impact do you think your win here should have on tennis in India?

"This is a big rejuvenating point in our career. I believe in setting goals and achieving them.

My goal is to dominate the doubles circuit. We are now in a position to do it and we would be fools to throw it away"

A: This is the pinnacle of doubles on the international circuit. And tennis has grown a lot in India over the last few years. But I really hope that this is showing them that we can be world-beaters. Because we can be.

In the last one-and-a-half years, there's been a lot of anxiety in India, 'Oh these guys are losing in semi-finals, they're jinxed, do they have it in them'. Then the Australian Open five-setter in the final showed us how close we could get. That was the turning point. Then the French happened, and the rest, as they say is history.

Q: How do you look back now on the decision to team



"Mahesh's big serve and good returns set me up to take over the forecourt, where my quick foot-speed, volleying and tactical strength help me dominate"

up with Mahesh and effectively sacrifice your singles rankings?

A: The first thing that one noticed then was that our technical sides complement each other. The fact that he has a big serve and good returns compensated for my lack of big serves or my returns, and set me up to take over the forecourt. The fact that my quick foot speed, my volleying and my tactical strength compensated for his lack in those departments. When you combine these two, it basically fits like hand in glove. And that's what really is our strength.

The other motivational factor was that we are both Indians, we both speak the same language, we share the same cultures. And so we motivate each other to play hard. We are both not going to be playing great every day. The days I'm struggling he can pick me up and take the lead; and on the days that he's struggling I can pick him up and dominate. That's very important.

I really had set out with a dream that we could be the first Indians to win Grand Slams and be number one. I really believed that we could. Not really many people believed in it. In fact, they deterred me, and told me that I was making a bad move, that I should be teaming up with someone in the top ten rather than someone who was ranked 390. But I'm a man of conviction and when I set my heart to do it, I know I'll put in the hard work required to make it happen. In fact, I think the obstacles that we've been through have made us want it a lot more. We were hungry for it. We've just got to keep this hunger for the next three, four, five years.

Q: In all the three Slam finals, you have exuded a quiet confidence. Even after the final points there has been no real display of emotion...

A: I'm not sure how to put this because I don't want it to come wrong, but I've been ready for what happened at the French for a year now. To a lot of other people it was 'wow', a shock. Not for me. I've been ready for it. So, what these wins bring is a sense of happiness, that the hard work is paying off, and even more so a sense of so many more goals to achieve. More Grand Slams, more Davis Cup victories, Olympic medals next year. To set goals and achieve them, that's what I really believe in.

Q: Will you be concentrating on doubles completely from now, or will you try and balance doubles and singles?

A: It is a very tough balance. Now, doubles is obviously taking the front seat. Right now we are playing around 28-30 weeks a year just of doubles. But the singles is a point of bother. There is a lot of anxiety over that. I still feel that I can be in the top 50, if not more. But there's a lot I need to do. First, I'll have to sit down with my coach, and my Dad and put things into a package to try and balance singles and doubles, to make sure that I keep doing well in my doubles and yet work my singles up.

Q: How much special preparation goes in to handling the pressures of being favourites?

A: That's what my coach is fantastic with. 'Nails', Bob Carmichael, is so good with his homework. That's what makes me one of the best doubles players in the world. The fact that he gets me so well-prepared for matches. Say if we are playing on Centre Court, while our next-round opponents are playing on Court 16, he'll be out there watching them, before coming back to watch us. So by the night before, he has already got what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are, and what he thinks we should do.

At this stage, it's the preparation that is so important. In professional sport, you're not going to have too many opportunities. So you've got to be ready every single day. And that's what makes it so exhausting on the circuit. When you've won a match, it's not over, it's just a starting point for your next match. So it's an ongoing, monotonous process.

Q: Which doubles teams would you pick as your toughest rivals?

A: Now, every match is tough because all the teams try that extra bit to beat us... Though the Woodies are a bit on

the decline, they've been the best at our game, apart from McEnroe and Fleming, and one can still learn a lot from watching them, especially on grass. We have a good, healthy rivalry going with Leach/Ferreira, and with Sandon Stolle, whoever he plays with.

Q: Among the top-ranked singles players, who do you interact with the most?

A: I've lived in Florida for about eight years now and I train at the same academy as Pete Sampras. So one shares a pleasant, casual friendship with him where we practice together some times, we laugh and joke. He's a real fabulous role model, a thorough gentleman, a fantastic tennis player, one of the all-time greatest I think. He is fun to practice with and be around. One learns a lot from him.

Apart from Pete, one shares a nice relationship with Agassi. He's always fun, we often share a joke and a chat. His father is an Olympian like my father and so they were

A: Yes, mate, I am... Well, I would say the maturity in myself. Having travelled on the circuit for nine years now, I know exactly what I have to do with my tennis. So it's just a matter of motivating myself, which is the easy part.

On a personal level, I have a girlfriend (Vicki Labbe) now who is very supportive of my profession and who has given up quite a lot to help me pursue it. She has a major in sciences. So she either wanted to be a dentist or go into business. The simple fact is that in this profession it's very tough on a relationship as I'm travelling a lot. I've been through a long relationship, and as you know, it didn't work out. So, Vicki had a big decision to make when she went home and spoke to her parents about it. I was very pleasantly happy that she chose to support me with my career. It takes a lot of courage, a lot of maturity for someone to do that. And now it's my responsibility to give back and support her the best as I can. And this is my way, making sure that I train as hard as I can and do everything that I can



ASHOKE CHAKRABARTY

"My girlfriend (Vicki Labbe) is very supportive of my profession and she has given up quite a lot to help me pursue it. It's my responsibility to do everything that I can to support her decision"

talking a lot during the Olympics. And I believe they both think that we are as crazy as each other. Jim (Courier) is more reserved than the other two. But he can be great fun, with his sudden spurts of energy, like he's recorded an album where he has sung and played all the instruments as well. So he can be good fun.

Q: The French, Queens, Rosmalen, Wimbledon, and now off to Newport. It must be really tough to keep fit?

A: Yes, it's really tough. Playing singles and doubles, week in week out, puts lots of stress and demands on your body. For the last two years, I have been travelling 42 weeks a year. I turned 26 a few weeks back, but the fact is that this ages you very fast.

Q: At a personal level, you seem to be at peace with yourself. What are the contributing factors?

daily to support the decision that she made.

Also, with my earnings, I can have my family travel with me. Because I travel 42 weeks, one doesn't get to go home to Calcutta that much, and hence one has to bring home to where I am. So sometimes my Dad, sometimes my girlfriend, sometimes both, are with me. So, on the circuit it's my coach, my girlfriend or/and my Dad

Q: You do follow other sports with quite a passion. Is that how you take a break from tennis?

A: Yes. Every other sport. Horse-riding, golf, soccer. Or watching the NBA, soccer or cricket. Anything but tennis. It's my freedom away from this monotonous routine. Vicki and I both love the ocean. So I like to scuba dive surf..

Q: So, is marriage on the cards?

A: Maybe, maybe, but nothing in the next six months. •

SPIRIT OF PATRIOTISM

Interesting contrasts Kargil has thrown up. There are some who blessedly unaffected went ahead carousing late into the night. Like the hip Delhi crowd Goanese pop singer Remo Fernandes had aswinging in the



rain recently. Not all are like that. Certainly not the glamorous demigods of Bollywood and our music industry. On 4 July, a Sunday, Bombay rocked alive to a dance and musical extravaganza. The event, *Ek Shuam Shahidon Ke Naam*, was organised by Bal Thackeray's daughter-in-law Smita Thackeray's Mukti Foundation. Keeping in mind the war, Sunil Shetty re-enacted scenes



from J.P. Dutt's hit movie *Border*. Govinda did what he knows best: dance. The crowd responded and, at the end, the Rs 50 lakh collected was handed over by Smita Thackeray to Indira Kumar, president of the Army Wives Welfare Association for war widows of Kargil. In the capital, Coke's turbaned mascot Daler Mehndi was at the New Delhi railway station flagging off the jawans to the battle-front.



Not many believe it, but patriotism still counts. Right?

A HAIRY AFFAIR

Shaven-headed film actresses aren't a pretty sight. But sometimes hair becomes a hindrance. Details:



TABU
Occupation: Actress

Claim to fame: Sizzled into stardom with *Maachis*, a film by Gulzar. At a more banal level, models for a shampoo brand — Lux. Her hair is her Unique Selling Point

Current status: Victim. Will have to shave off her silken tresses if she is to act in Mehta's film *Water* where she plays the part of a bald woman

DEEPA MEHTA
Occupation: Film director

Claim to fame: *Fire*, her film where two sisters-in-law find solace in a lesbian relationship. Succeeded in inflaming the heterosexual morality of Bal Thackeray's thugs

Current status: Aggressor. Says there's no question of a compromise. This isn't a commercial film, you know. Bald means bald. Scalp wigs are out



CONCLUSION: Times must be tough — an actress losing hair over water

RIISING CAREER GRAPH



SHEETAL MALHAR

From pretty girl next door to the newest Indian face to endorse international beauty products. Now spokesmodel for Maybelline International, Malhar, who took Paris by storm some years ago, joins the exclusive club of international spokesmodels which includes Christy Turlington, Sarah Michelle Gellar and Tomiko Fraser. She'll also feature in some of Maybelline's advertisements alongside Christy.



I. ALLAN SEALY

Ascending arc of fortune for the Dehra Dun-based author whose first book, *The Trotternama*, was literally run over when it came out by another more famous — Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. *Trotternama* now stages a comeback with a new cover designed by Iru Chaudhari. Its rebirth after 11 years of oblivion, courtesy India Ink, was celebrated at a socialite evening.

TO SHAVE OR NOT TO SHAVE

Resurrected after years of humiliating neglect: moustaches, for centuries the symbol of proud manhood. Things changed somewhat once irreverent twin-blades and safety razors came on the scene and girls looked more to clean-shaven men for partners. They have to thank

actress-turned-writer **Tara Deshpande** for the new interest. Deshpande is making a documentary called *The Great Indian Mooch*. Two songs have already been recorded on the subject which she describes as esoteric. "It's not going to be a typical documentary but more of a docu-drama," she says. Whatever it is, more than the frills it's the research work that has gone behind the subject which makes the whole exercise mind-boggling. She has been scouting in libraries for information and photographs on maharajas with long moustaches. So stop shaving guys, there's at least one gorgeous woman you can impress.



IT'S DESTINY

Soni Razdan, second wife of director Mahesh 'Maverick' Bhatt, is back to where she began. Inspired by the Hollywood hit, *One Fine Day*, she is producing her serial *Aur Phir Ek Din* which is being directed by Vinta Nanda. The scriptwriter is Raman Kumar. A thematic illustration:



Razdan

Razdan plays the female lead opposite **Kiran Kumar**. Both are single parents and eligible for another fling. Kindly fate has ensured that the path to their impending union is hassle free. Razdan has lost her husband (**Dilip Dhawan**). The guy, we are told, has been knocked off in a road accident. Kumar is separated from his wife (**Lillette Dubey**). It's dicey, but two KOs would have looked suspicious.



Kumar

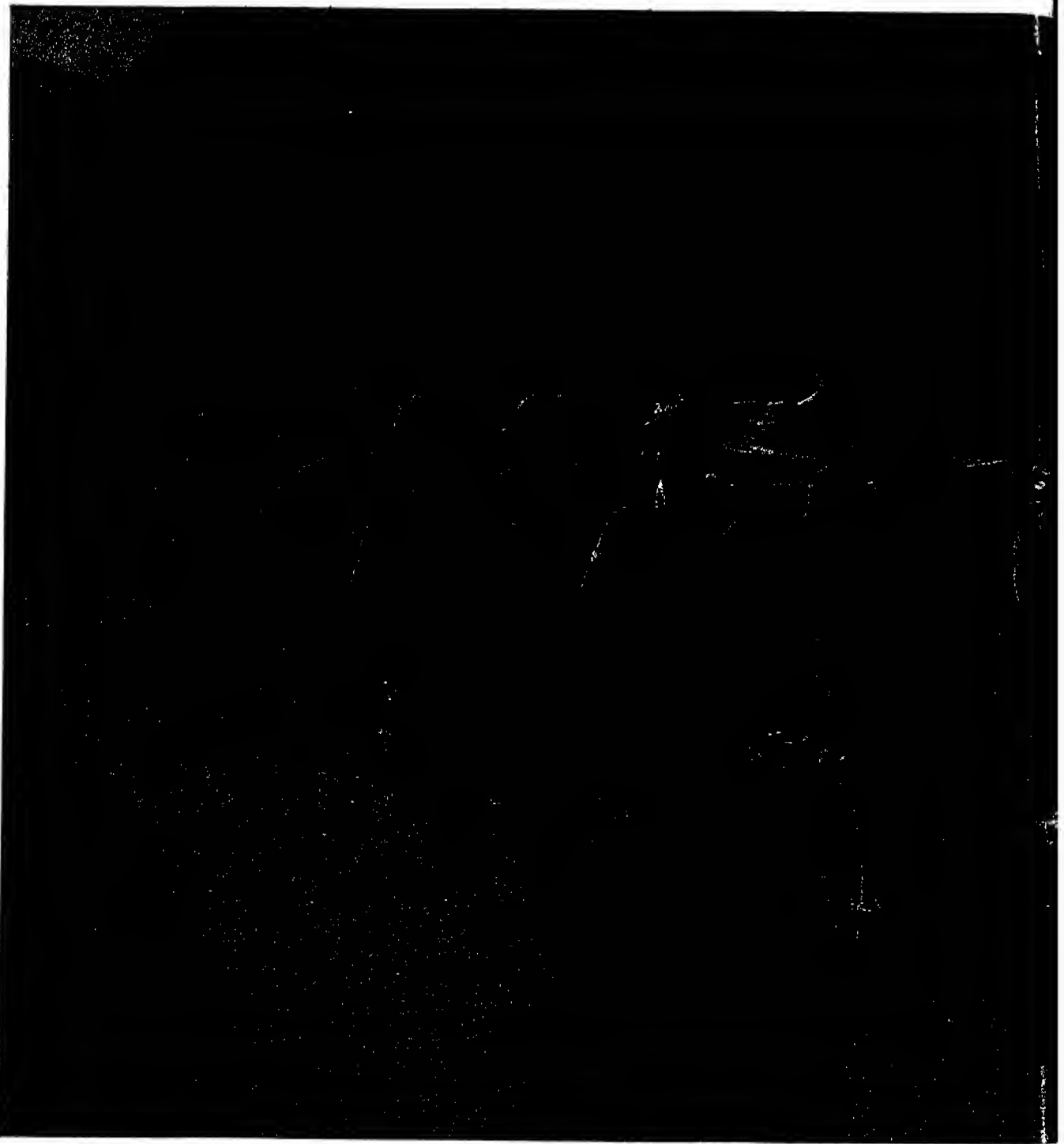
How do they meet? No problem there: their children, who study in the same school, bring them together. The serial's slated for a late-July release.



Dubey



Dhawan



For some days, the day in Kargil ends in a lament the death of a warrior killed in the battlefields.

LIFE

ON THE LINE

The story of riflemen Banta Singh, Bhim Bahadur, Buland Baksh and Balram Prasad

THERE IS NO CLOCK regulating their life or routine. No difference between night and day. At times it is a seven-day week the year round, come rain, storm, snow, even earthquake. Smiling, uncomplaining and dutifully, they greet hardships. In the bivouac, bunker, barn or trench, knee-deep in mud and slush, these are Banta Singh, Bhim Bahadur, Buland Baksh, Balram Prasad, et al, your *jawans* for all season.

Working round the clock, his endurance and tolerance at one level and deprivation and suffering at another, are amazing and unsurpassed. Something to celebrate and also worry about.

Banta Singh will put his life on the line for his own honour and that of the regiment, his unwavering line disappearing into the smoke and wrath of battle. Up Tiger Hill, he's guided by the Gita and the Army Act, not the labour, company or industrial Acts. Traditions handed over by generations and their collective counsel have instilled in him, simply, good order, military discipline and obedience of orders.

Bhim Bahadur is on the recaptured heights of Tololing. Along with his machine gun, he has brought the qualities of loyalty, bravery and gaiety. Standing atop Point 5140, he will introduce to you in Hindi, the landmarks towards the Line of Control (LoC): "*Samne dekh!*" The general line of direction.

These who sacrificed their lives in war are honoured



Keeping vigil
at Dras: action
station

The Dras action station is a small, isolated outpost in the heart of the Karakoram range, where the Indian and Pakistani armies have been fighting a bitter battle for control of the region. The station is a simple, rectangular building with a flat roof, built on a rocky outcrop. It is surrounded by a high wall and a barbed wire fence. The landscape is barren and desolate, with no vegetation and no other buildings in sight. The sky is dark and cloudy, and the overall atmosphere is one of tension and isolation.

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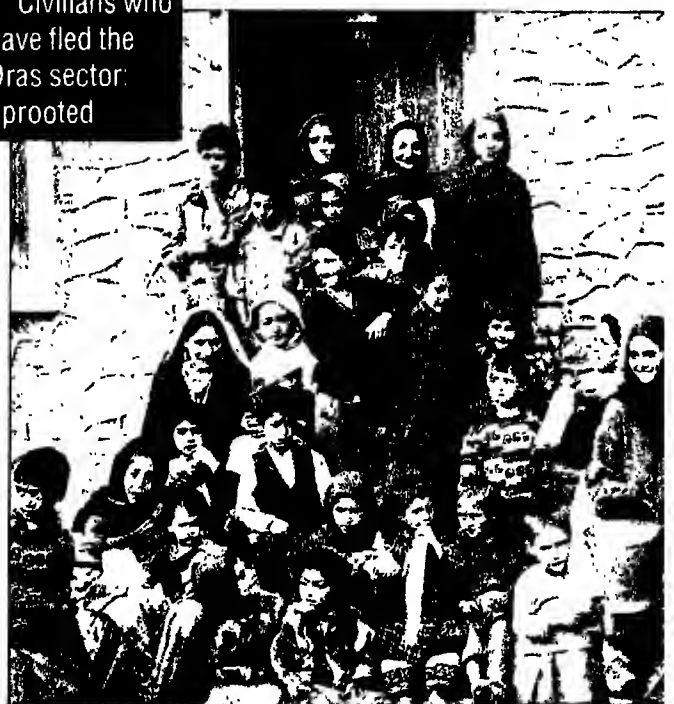
Makeshift kitchen at the front: variety is the spice...

...to the east of Batalik, near the Indian border, is a small village called Batalik. It is a small village, but it is a very important village. It is the only village on the Indus river which claims Roman history. Alexander's army had fought crossings over Indus on a bridge front near Attock. Perhaps Roman legionnaires were the first intruders in Batalik who were never evicted.

Respite in and between battles means spare time for *jawans*. Each soldier carries his Victory pad, photo of his family or, if a bachelor, Begum Para or Sridevi, a copy of the Ten Commandments, the *jawan* transistor and free inland letters. He loves writing and receiving letters from his family. The latest craze is the free STD calls or messages to his village or home.

Old soldiers recall how in 1962, Chinese troops, despite being felled, would come swarming their posts in sequel attacks. A Pak soldier in Batalik has described the onslaught of Indian attacks similarly. Guru Govind Singh's "*sawa lakh sey ek ladaun*" rubbishes Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's bravado of one Pakistani being equal to ten Indians.

Civilians who have fled the Dras sector: uprooted





Prayer time for the *muwans*. House of God

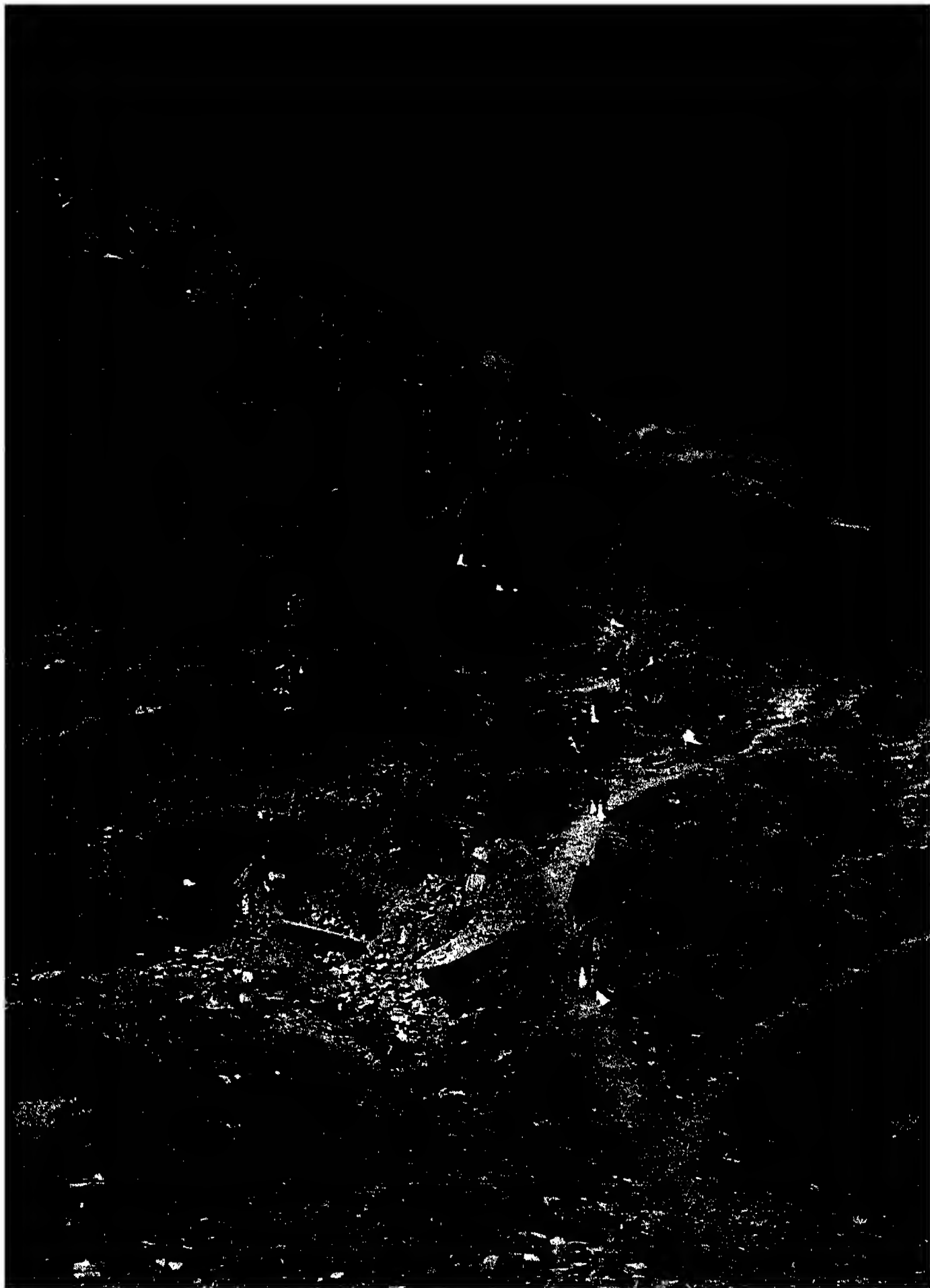


A tailoring shop at Sonamarg: measure for measure

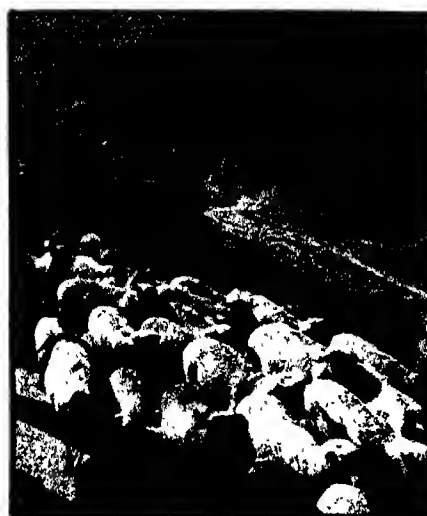


Boots, bags arrive from the front: the end game too soon

The news that one day in Kargil, cells in a mountainous area, the *muwans* are not far from the front. But do not think of them as a warrior killed in the battlefield as those who spend their lives in war are honoured men. Let India, which has for ever, peace to a man and woman, never forget this. — *Dr. R. K. Sharma, New Delhi*



THE INDIAN JAWAN



P.V. ADHARV

He's a lean, mean killing machine. He's got to be looked after

Is Kargil going to be a turning point for the *jawan* of the 21st century? As in the past, promises and commitments to respect and honour the *jawan* are being made with force and fervour. Will these words turn into deeds?

The Chief of Army Staff, Gen V.P. Malik, had no inkling how prophetic his decision would be to declare the last year of the millennium the Year of the Jawan. This dedication came at least 20 years too late. But thank heavens it came at all. Kargil is the *jawan's* last test of the century. He has fought and sacrificed in more wars in the 20th century than any other soldier in the world.

Yet, this very *jawan* has been treated casually and ungenerously by his country. He is revered and respected much more by his erstwhile colonial masters than his present set of rulers. He has been taken for granted by too many, for too long.

Is Kargil going to be a turning point for the *jawan* of the 21st century? As in the past, promises and commitments to respect and honour the *jawan* are being made with force and fervour. Will these words turn into deeds? For the sake of this country and the *jawan*, they had better.

More than 300 soldiers have been killed and nearly twice that number wounded and missing. This is a staggeringly high figure in seven weeks of intense uphill, high-altitude combat. These casualties are the approximate equivalent of two years of proxy war throughout India which has claimed 4,000 casualties in the last ten years.

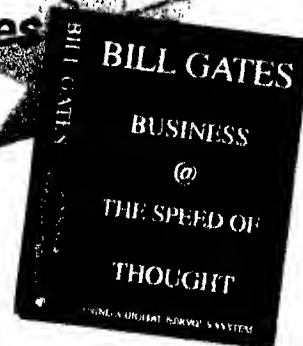
The striking features of the Kargil casualties are the phenomenally high ratios of killed to wounded, officer to *jawan* and artillery to bullet hits. In the highest traditions of the army, assaults are officer-led. Nearly 70 per cent of all casualties are artillery-inflicted.



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'V' for Vijay

PM's address to the three service chiefs and the army commanders on 10 July, 1999

"Operation Vijay has given great 'Vijay' to the country. This is a historic moment for all of us. It is only befitting, therefore, that in these few brief sentences that I share with you, my first tribute and homage is to those brave soldiers and airmen of our country who fought, laid down their lives or were wounded, to achieve this Vijay. To them, the nation owes an everlasting debt of gratitude.

"I take this opportunity to also, unstintingly, place on record the great appreciation, indeed admiration, that our entire nation has today for the outstanding valour, determination and military skill that has been demonstrated in Operation Vijay. Our brave military has achieved one sterling success after another in these operations."



Since 1947, nearly 17,000 *jawans* have given their lives for the safety and honour of the nation. Many more have been disabled and their families left in the lurch. They are remembered and cared for mainly by their regiments. Rarely, some feeble noises are made by others

about their distress. The truth is, they are forgotten.

Western experts who have followed the march of the Indian Army are surprised that despite the perpetually stressful and casualty-causing operational environment, there are no real strains and

cracks in the system. One of them even wondered why there had never been a mutiny. The army has remained apolitical and the *jawans* unflinchingly loyal. They are happy even when they get so little after giving so much.

In the Fifth Pay Commission, the



ANIL K. TALWAR

jawans who gave back this country its Tiger and Tololing Hills were accorded the ultimate indignity, being equated with unskilled labour. Their living conditions are incredibly unsatisfactory. There is a deficiency of nearly Rs 10,000 crore in housing alone. Yet, they cheerfully fulfill a most difficult operational mandate given to soldiers anywhere. It has been left to the army establishment to innovate recognition like a badge of sacrifice. Why does a widow need a badge or a button? It is time the nation thought about the *jawan* beyond Kargil.

Early this year, a poll was carried out on where 16 different professions stand in the public's pecking order. In the categories of the most respected profession and the one deserving better recognition and incentives, the armed forces emerged right on top. According to the ratings, only doctors find a place above soldiers.

Fifty years after Independence, a public reverence poll was held in metros to measure among different professionals, the qualities of honesty, efficiency, bravery and contribution to the nation. Army officers top on every count with upwards of 80 per cent rating. Both the

The immediate upshot of the war is a package of welfare measures, the brainchild of defence minister George Fernandes, for the casualties in Kargil. A general in the welfare organisation of the army said: "This package has breached all bureaucratic fault-lines of the past"



V. FAJARKER

public and the polls it seems, are fickle. Or that proclamations are not being translated into actions.

What the *jawans* really care for is *izzat*. The government and the nation have denied them this. The most vivid example was the indignity with which the Indian Peace-Keeping Force was deinducted from Sri Lanka. First it was booted out from there and then called a Tamil Killing Force by the chief min-

ister of Tamil Nadu.

During the VJ and VE commemoration week, India was the only country not to honour its soldiers' sacrifices in World War II. Of the 250,000 *jawans* who fought that war, nearly half (106,843) were killed and wounded. Among all the Commonwealth countries, it was Indians who won the highest number of gallantry awards. Neither sacrifice nor gallantry was commemo-

From father to son

Foreign minister and former army officer Jaswant Singh writes to the Indian soldier

Dear Son,

I am so proud, also filled with reminiscences and nostalgia. Proud to see you in uniform answering the call. For that is just what it is: Soldiering is not just another job; it is a commitment and it is, in the ultimate, a calling alone. Also it is for life: once a soldier always so, that is why one lays down one's life for the calling. Also, this call of soldiering is not at someone else's beckoning, it is born within, as an unstoppable urge, to reach beyond the self; to ennoble life by giving it up in service of a cause; a cause that transcends, cleans us of dross, lifts us from the demeaning trivia of routine.

I am reminiscent and filled with nostalgia because when I see you in uniform I go back in time, to my younger days when I, too, had the honour of Commission and the right to wear this uniform. As indeed, many decades earlier, your grandfather — my father — had also answered the call. And so, in that ascending order, generation beyond generation, we have always answered this call.

What advice can I give you? Be true to your salt, to the calling of a Soldier which is synonymous with honour. I need hardly tell you that your safety and welfare can only be your last priority — those of your compatriots or those for whom you are responsible will, I know and am confident, always take precedence: that is why the motto on the cap badge of the NDA is 'Service Before Self'

What is honour and why do soldiers [your colleagues] so readily fight and die? Honour is *izzat* but it is also much more. For without a sense of honour, what code of conduct can there possibly be to guide us? And in the absence of such a code, how can we transcend ourselves, or serve as noble a cause as the nation's good? I know that you know it is this inherent sense of *izzat* that inspires all soldiers: *izzat* of the nation, of the Army, your Unit, your own self — that sense is your *kul parampara* and *kul maryada*. Observe both.

There is no nobler a calling than that of a soldier; also, there is no truer service of the nation than as a soldier. You have the honour to do so today. I know you will do it well. But do it without enmity and, of course, without any sense of hatred, for your noble calling has no place in it for such base sentiments. I know these do not motivate you; the spring of your inspired calling rises elsewhere — in pure nationalism.

God go with you,

Your loving Father.



Be true to your salt, to the calling of a Soldier which is synonymous with honour. I need hardly tell you that your safety and welfare can only be your last priority — those of your compatriots or those for whom you are responsible will, I know and am confident, always take precedence; that is why the motto on the cap badge of the NDA is 'Service Before Self'

morated. It was obtusated in politics

1991-2000 (1 April 1999-31 March 2000) has been decreed as the Year of the *Jawan*. The purpose is to tangibly improve the quality of life of the *jawan* concentrating on the service conditions, training and welfare. The key to this rejuvenation is the renewal of faith in the *jawan* that the army and country care for him. He is the cutting edge of the fighting machine. It is his morale, motivation and military skills that have to be honed to perform impossible missions in Dras and Batalik. This is a job, not just for the

army, navy or air force but for the peoples and governments of India

JUST AS TIGER Hill and Jubal were the turning points in the Kargil war, the unprecedented groundswell of public and government support for the *jawan* fighting the war is the dawn of a new era in civil-military relations in India. This emotional upsurge, one hopes, is not the usual flash in the pan generated by war.

After Dhaka, the *jawan* is giving to the country, in less than 30 years, the second decisive victory against

Pakistan, this time against much heavier odds. When this war started two months ago, no one believed it could be finished, if at all, before winter. Now it is over in less than 45 days. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in his address to army commanders on 10 July, declared victory even before the withdrawal had started the next day.

The ordinary signaller, sapper, gunner and mfanter, ably supported by other *jawans*, has won back Kargil for the country.

During World War II, the Japanese



Kargil has changed the nation's view of the *jawan*. He has been put on a pedestal. This victory of the *jawan* is a victory of the ordinary people of India who have given as never before their unflinching support to the soldier

juggernaut could not be halted by the Chinese, Koreans, Russians, Dutch, Americans, British, Australians or New Zealanders. It was the Indian *jawan* who finally checked the Japanese advance at Kohima. He was the main pillar of the British empire and Pax Britannica.

Upto now, the war casualties and their Next of Kin (NoK) were given a bitter pill of compensation to swallow. They were left to fend for themselves and promises made by central and state governments, even private enterprises, on relief, rehabilitation and welfare were seldom kept. The feeling among *jawans* was of being used and discarded.

Kargil has changed the nation's view of the *jawan*. He has been put on the pedestal and hailed by school kids, chief ministers, film stars, cricketers, even the *raddiwallahs*. The chief ministers' meeting, convened last week by the Prime Minister, sent out a strong message of support to the *jawan* on Jubar and Tiger Hill. They set up an eight-member panel with defence, finance and six chief ministers to formulate a national policy on

the welfare of *jawans* and ex-servicemen on an institutionalised and permanent basis. Every sailor, airman, soldier and officer of the three services is to be assured of adequate relief, resettlement and in the case of the deceased, matching benefits for NoK.

The immediate upshot of the war is an incredibly attractive package of welfare measures, the branchchild of defence minister George Fernandes, for the casualties in Kargil. A general in the welfare organisation of the army said: "Only Fernandes could have got us such a good package. It has breached all bureaucratic fault-lines of the past."

For the first time, Indian *jawans* would be entitled to compensation upto Rs 5 lakh. What is most gratifying is the stated intention to provide necessary finances for the rehabilitation of widows or NoK of battle casualties and the wounded of previous wars. Service headquarters have been asked to search as far back as the first war in J&K in 1947.

The Kargil welfare package will be supported by contributions made by

ordinary people and organisations starting from 1 May 1999, to the National Defence Fund and Services Welfare Fund. Its main features are:

Lifting of ceiling

The ceiling of Rs 10 lakh on total compensation from ex-gratia grants of central and state governments has been waived.

Benefits

A war widow or NoK who would previously have got a total sum of about Rs 8 to 10 lakh will now get anything between Rs 18 to 20 lakh. For an officer, this amount will go from Rs 18 to 35 lakh. A liberalised pension scheme of the last salary drawn will now be entitled to the deceased's NoK.

Disability

At present, there is no compensation for battle injuries. Now, Rs 5 lakh will be given for 100 per cent disability and pro rata basis for lesser disability. Those invalided from services will receive full cost of medical treatment and equipment in India or abroad.

Housing

Rs 5 lakh per family of the deceased for buying a house or a piece of land. An identical provision for those invalided from service.

Children's education

Rs 2 lakh per family will be placed in fixed deposit by the government. This money will be available later for marriage/resettlement.

THE KARGIL CAMPAIGN has come to an end mainly on terms set by the government: vacation of aggression without crossing the LoC. This victory of the *jawan* is a victory of the ordinary people of India who have given as never before their unflinching support to the soldier. The time is ripe to hasten implementation of reforms pending for decades in order to rectify the glaring and growing deficiencies in the defence and national security apparatus. A national service, not lip-service, is required.

Recognition and respect for the *jawan* must become part of national consciousness. Once that happens, the bureaucrat will elevate the infantry *jawan* beyond the status of a daily-wage

A soldier's story

Feted in war, forgotten in peace: Maj. Gen. Ian Cardozo (retd) on the plight of the Indian *jawan*

LITTLE DID THE army chief realise when he declared that 1999 would be the 'Year of the Jawan' that combat soldiers of the army would be carving this slogan in letters of blood on the icy slopes of the Kargil-Dras battlefield — one of the highest and coldest battlegrounds of the world. Undaunted by the impediments pitted against him — pitiless weather conditions, a savage and brutal foe in command of critical and dominating heights, and denial of the military option of crossing the Line of Control — the *jawan* has been unflinching in his resolve to eject the enemy from his country's sacred soil.

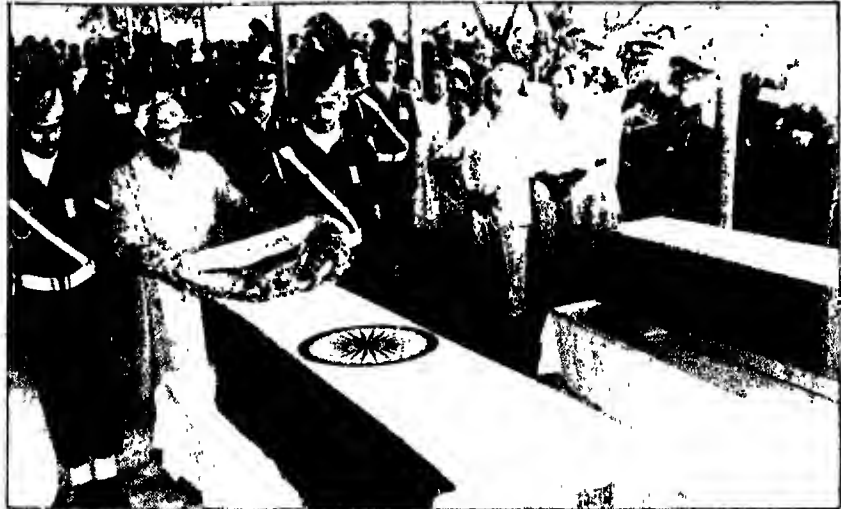
Doing his job, the way he has been taught, he is bewildered at the mantle of adulation suddenly thrown around his shoulders by an exuberant and enthusiastic public. He asks, "My friend, where were you before Kargil, when my dead comrades came in anonymous crates from J&K and the north-east? Where were you only a few months ago when the army mourned its dead alone, and it was only the regimental family that comforted weeping widows and sobbing children?"

He knows the answers because it was only he and his colleagues who contributed a day's wages for each combatant who died so as to tide over these widows' immediate predicament. He smiles enigmatically when asked whether these widows and the war-disabled ever received any grant from the National Defence Fund or the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. He knows the answer and so do we. He knows that the widows and the war-disabled of all wars previous to 1986 i.e. 1947, 1962, 1965 and 1971 are eking out a precarious existence today because the babus of the ministry of defence have discriminated against them by refusing to equate their pensions with the increased pensions that have been awarded to the war casualties that took place after 1 March, 1986 — an arbitrary date fixed by baleful babudom! He remembers the promises made by a grateful government after the 1971 War.

Promises that were soon forgotten — free education for the children of widows and of those who were disabled that never materialised, offers of land that were never given, offers of gas agencies and petrol pumps that were given only to a select few, a promise of a national memorial to those who have died for the country which the government is still 'thinking about'. He is puzzled that human rights activists target him and his colleagues on frivolous trumped-up charges but remain strangely silent when his colleagues are brutally tortured, disfigured and murdered.

He shakes his head in an emphatic 'No' when asked whether his state authorities look after his interests when he is away on the border guarding the nation's frontiers. He is amazed at the superior weapons and equipment he captures from the enemy and wonders why it has taken 52 years for his government to give him a reasonable lightweight rifle to combat the enemy.

Notwithstanding all this, he knows he has a job to do and that he has to do it well. He knows that he and his beloved young officers who lead from the front will fight for their precious 'Bharat Mata' with any enemy that dares to threaten her security. He does not ask for much — only care for the loved ones he leaves behind. Can we live up to his request?



The Indian soldier knows that he and his beloved young officers who lead from the front will fight for their precious 'Bharat Mata' with any enemy that dares to threaten her security. He does not ask for much — only care for the loved ones he leaves behind

A few good men

Rear Admiral Satyindra Singh (ret'd) salutes the Indian soldier

OUR JAWAN, WHO has excelled himself again and brought us so much honour at Kargil, is the shining star of our firmament. He is the vital ingredient of the fourth-largest army and the largest volunteer army of the world. In the undeclared Kargil war so perversely unleashed on us by Pakistan, over 350 *jawans* and five personnel of the air force have been martyred; nine are still missing and over 450 have been wounded. The supreme sacrifice in each case has been in the highest traditions of our armed services.

Day after day, we have now witnessed more and more unsurpassed heroic deeds in the most difficult and formidable terrain. In the earlier wars, the difficult terrain extended from the highest mountains to the burning sands of Rajasthan. The Indian *jawan* is an institution that gives much and receives much less but he continues to do his duty to the nation with an unfaltering smile. A friend in Silicon Valley, California, sent an e-mail message yesterday asking: "What does the Indian Army feed their soldiers for them to maintain an impeccable loyalty in an otherwise corrupt nation?" Adding "that this was totally mind-boggling". In my answer, I told him that the Indian *jawan* sustains himself with a sparse quantity of ration, enough ammunition and a strong reserve of simple *izzat*.

We need to shed the current craze of competitive exhibitionism, announcing more and more goodies and blood donation camps galore. Undoubtedly, these satisfy a 'hungry-for-media-attention' politician but do the *jawan* no good in any intrinsic manner whatsoever. More cash to the Army Headquarters Welfare Fund is the only answer.

The *jawan* has brought us signal honour in the four wars since Independence and many counter-insurgency operations and 16 *jawans* of our army and one of the air force are the first among equals who are holders of the Param Vir Chakra. Only two of them are living legends. To this would now be added the gallantry awards — many posthumous — of the 'Kargil War', now nearing end.

The Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Ved Malik has announced that this is going to be the Year of the *Jawan* and very appropriately, the motto of the General's Regiment is 'Aut Viam Inveniam Aut Faciam' — I shall find a way or make one! It is time that a way is found for the award of the Bharat Ratna to the Indian *jawan*. To use the Churchillian phrase: "Never was so much owed by so many to so few!"

The life-long idols of reverence and light of Field Marshal K.M. Cariappa, the Indian Army's first commander-in-chief after Independence were: Mother, Father and the *jawan* and he saluted them as the first act of his daily routine. A lesson to be learnt.

The Indian *jawan* is an institution that gives much and receives much less but he continues to do his duty to the nation. He sustains himself with a sparse quantity of ration, enough ammunition and a strong reserve of simple *izzat*



labourer. National attitude to men in uniform must also change.

George Fernandes had set himself a goal to make the armed forces more egalitarian. He had also promised to initiate reforms at the institutional, personnel and operational levels. These are overdue. The anomalies of the Fifth Pay Commission, the standardisation of

high-altitude and counter-insurgency allowances and the ease of pension disparities have to be settled.

The ten-year neglect of defence allocation, its non-planning and ad hoc spending has to stop. The services tribunal, in the closet for ten years, requires to be unveiled quickly.

Sadly, the national memorial to the

jawan in Delhi is still a blueprint. In fact, every state should dedicate a monument to the *jawan*. Now that the last intruder has been evicted from Kargil, a day in July should be declared Kargil Day. As for the incomparable *jawan*, not just 1999 but every year must become his year. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

The Gunner's War

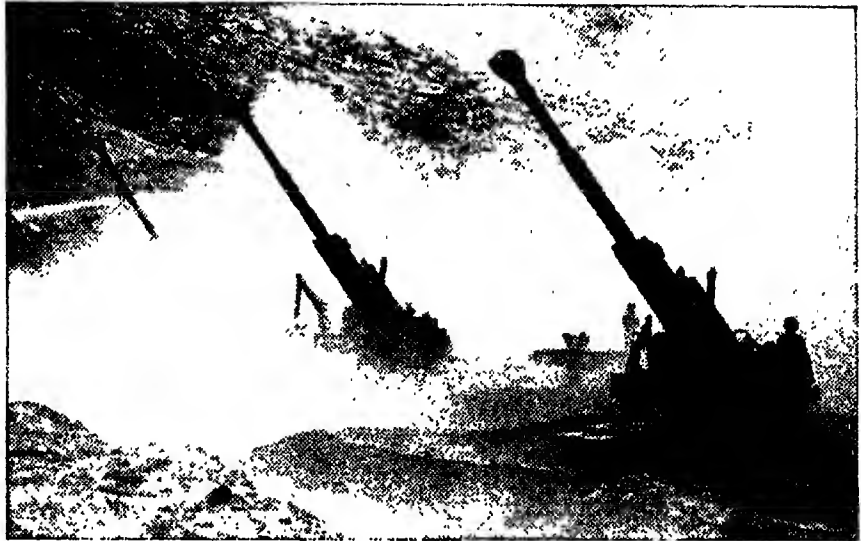
How the artillery won the day for the army

Three days into Operation Vijay, with more than 20 soldiers killed, it appeared foolhardy to carry on waging hand-to-hand combat. The only answer was to hit the enemy hard by air and artillery before the Indian troops started their assault. But after the loss of three aircraft, the air force decided to fly well above the target to avoid being hit by the Stinger missiles.

Thus a heavy onus fell on the artillery. Within days, about 60 (and later 30 more) Bofors were moved to Dras, Batalik and Kaksar sectors. Since most of the strategic posts had been lost, it was difficult for the observation officers to direct fire. However, after some hard work and effective ground reconnaissance, the guns began to deliver. Almost all guns in the Indian arsenal were used, with the Bofors spearheading the attack.

Yet, the casualty rate didn't come down. It was obvious the covering fire was not sufficient. The prescribed rule is that for every infantry unit there are six guns in direct support. In Operation Vijay, this was changed to 18 guns. This was much-needed insurance for the troops. The gunner had to ensure sustained and effective fire on the enemy. Indian gunners fired five to 6,000 shells on an average each day. Much of the ammunition could have been saved if India had had a few more strategic points to observe from and direct fire. Pakistan had this advantage and therefore fired only 500 to 600 shells each day. While the Bofors alone fired 1,000-1,200 shells per day, this increased on the day of an assault. For instance, 9,000 shells were fired the day Tiger Hill was regained.

Sustaining this kind of fire put a heavy strain on the guns as well as the gunners. In fact, two Bofors barrels burst due to over-heating. Similar damage happened to the 105mm Indian Field Gun too. Most of the firing was done during night and often continued into the wee hours of the morning. At times, the artillery observation officer with the infantry would make an extra effort to move ahead of the assaulting forces and bring fire on enemy logistics. In such situations, the guns were kept busy till late morning.



Indian gunners fired up to 6,000 shells on an average each day. The Bofors alone fired 1,000-1,200 shells per day and this increased on the day of an assault. For instance, 9,000 shells were fired the day Tiger Hill was regained

It was no "shoes off" even after the firing stopped. The gunners had to clean their barrels, check each part, store ammunition for the next round of shelling so that the guns remained battle-worthy throughout.

Though the gun area is always located at a distance from the front, it doesn't mean the threat to it is any less. In fact, they're the best targets for the enemy and that is why they're kept out of reach. If this was a full-scale war, the maximum threat to gun areas would have come from enemy air force. The absence of enemy air raids helped quicker deployment of guns as well. Most of the guns were kept in the open, on either side of the National Highway (NH-1A).

Being in the open made the gunners vulnerable. According to a general officer of the artillery, ten per cent of those killed in the operation are gunners — a high casualty rate by battle standards. Most of these weren't the observers who move with the infantry — but the gunners in the gun area.

The crucial role of the artillery can be gauged from the speedy advance of Indian troops after mid-June. At places, the infantry faced very light resistance. Point 4875, a post south-west of Tiger Hill, was captured without a single casualty to the infantry. The post was renamed 'Gun Hill'. The destruction of a fuel and ammunition dump north of Kukarhang in Batalik by the devastating fire of 105mm guns was crucial to the capture of Jubat in the same sector.

Sources have revealed to SUNDAY that several commando missions were undertaken during the latter half of Operation Vijay. These were artillery observers who entered behind enemy lines and successfully brought fire on enemy guns.

Guns and Gunners are often forgotten after any operation, mainly because they are seen as playing only a supportive role. But in an operation where the artillery has fired more than 1.5 lakh shells in about a month, it can be safely termed as a 'mainstay'. •

Pranab Dhal Samanta/New Delhi



"The Kargi good tonic the army"

Says army chief Gen. V.P. Malik

When SUNDAY interviewed Gen. V.P. Malik, he was firmly of the view the war was not over yet. He warned that we are "dealing with an enemy who is unpredictable, unreliable and tells lies". He went on to answer questions on the war and the jawan. Excerpts

SUNDAY: At what stage were you most worried during the war?

Gen. V.P. Malik: Well, in the beginning just when it all started, there was anxiety as the picture was not very clear. Later, it was during the battle for Tololing heights and Point 5140 in Dras that I kept my fingers crossed. That was the success that I was looking for.

Q: When did you realise that the army was over the hump?

A: It was after the capture of Tiger Hill, Point 4875 and Point 5303 in Dras. And Point 5203 in Batalik.

Q: What would you have done had the enemy cut off the Leh road and/or occupied Zojila Pass?

A: If he had just cut the road, I would have attacked him from the east and west. I brought in 6 Mountain Division partly through Ushir Manali and the rest through Zojila. Had Zojila been lost, it would have forced the conflict beyond the LoC — a much wider conflict.

Q: To what do you attribute the success of operations?

A: The strength of our *jawans*, the strength of military leadership — from commanding officers down to junior officers, particularly young officers who have led the boys from upfront. Other than this is the abundance of regimental spirit. Take the recovery of Major Sarvanan's body.

"One feels sorry for the human losses we have suffered. But I am more confident now after Kargil about the Indian armed forces juggernaut. It is moving and is effective"

The campaign is a for the country and

from Jubai by 1 Bihar. The *jawans* kept vigil for 25 days and refused to withdraw till the body was recovered.

Artillery has been a significant ingredient of success. Also, the airstrikes on logistic bases such as Manih Dhalo and precision strikes on Tiger Hill. Air was not as effective against enemy posts but IAF kept innovating and were ever willing.

Q: Who fought the battles?

A: The divisional commanders and below. They were involved in the planning and conduct of operations with the corps and army commander overseeing.

Q: Anything else on the war?

A: I have seen commanders one day down in the dumps, rise in spirit after a nudge— a stick and carrot works. It is important for senior commanders to visit the battle zone without interfering in its conduct. I made six trips to the front and I don't think I made myself objectionable. In fact, I could help by arranging the immediate needs for battle— air photos, binoculars, guns —bypassing normal channels.

Q: Did you get a free hand to fight the war?

A: Yes, except for the restriction on crossing the LoC. I will not, at this stage, say anything more on this as the war is not over. The decision not to cross it initially was correct.

The three service chiefs would meet the Cabinet every day and were kept informed of the non-military aspects of the war.

Q: Did you have any problems at all?

A: Not really. I won't discuss the larger problems right now. But there was no interference from any quarter in the conduct of the campaign.

Q: But crossing the LoC...?

A: The operations are not over, so I won't say anything more on this. But there were many positive aspects of civil-military relations. There was close coordination and harmony with the ministry of external affairs. I'd been kept informed and consulted where necessary, including by the National Security Adviser.

All the three service chiefs have been part of the consultation process but I'm the one most intimately involved in



V.P. Malik with his men: "We owe it to the *jawans* for reminding the nation to be conscious of its security needs"

the war. The navy has played its role and made its own contribution to the war effort. I'm afraid I cannot tell you how.

Q: Why did the army wait 50 years to declare 1999 the Year of the Jawan?

A: You should ask me why I declared it now, not why it did not happen in the past. I cannot answer for the past. The army and the nation needed to focus on the *jawan*, his strengths, and make up his shortcomings in welfare, career management, training and most of all, his *izzat*.

There is a comprehensive plan for addressing these problems in every army command. The aim is to improve the quality of life and other facilities for the *jawan*. The state of transit camps has been improved, he can now travel by air to the north-east and J&K and other facilities are in the pipeline. But this is not a job for the army alone. The country, the people and the government of the day have to get together for this.

Q: Are you relieved the war is over?

A: As I told you, for me, it is not over. I do not trust Pakistan. He may not leave!

But I am more confident now after Kargil about the Indian armed forces juggernaut. It is moving and is effective. One feels sorry for the human losses we have suffered. But the Kargil campaign is a good tonic for the country and the army. The credit for this must go to the *jawan*.

We owe it to the *jawans* for reminding the nation to be prepared and conscious of its security needs. •

Interviewed by Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

How Kargil War

A blow-by-blow account

Defence minister George Fernandes was visiting Partapur and Siachen on 7 May when intrusions in Kargil were 'suspected', reported by civilians in Batalik. Patrols sent towards the intrusions went missing. Another patrol disappeared in Dras. On 12 May Fernandes was told by field commanders in Srinagar (as he was in Partapur) that infiltrators had occupied some ridges across the LoC and would be cleared in two to three days. This was, however, not reflected in the army sitrep the next day. The incident was taken lightly.

FOG OF WAR

Whenever any army is surprised by the enemy, it takes time to digest the fact and unravel the event. This is what happened in Kargil. The fog of war immediately enveloped the area of intrusions. On 26 May, Operation Vijay was formally launched across the fog and cloud over Kargil. The ground situation was no doubt less confused but no clear picture of the scale and the size of the intrusions was available till the middle of June.

Nearly one infantry brigade of soldiers from Pakistan's Northern Light infantry regiments and about 2,000 Mujahideens armed with heavy machineguns, anti-aircraft guns, Stinger missiles and God's edict, had occupied formidable posts across the LoC.

Their mission: draw the Indian army into these traps and draw international attention on J&K.

By and by, India turned this military masterstroke into a misadventure. Pakistan's military gamble boomeranged.

THE COUNTER-ATTACK

The fourth largest in the world, lumbering Indian military machine, took its time to recoil. In the beginning, it got a severe beating. Ideally, a war should



start with a victorious battle. For India, the reverse happened. Till three weeks later, the army registered its first win in Dras on the Tololing heights.

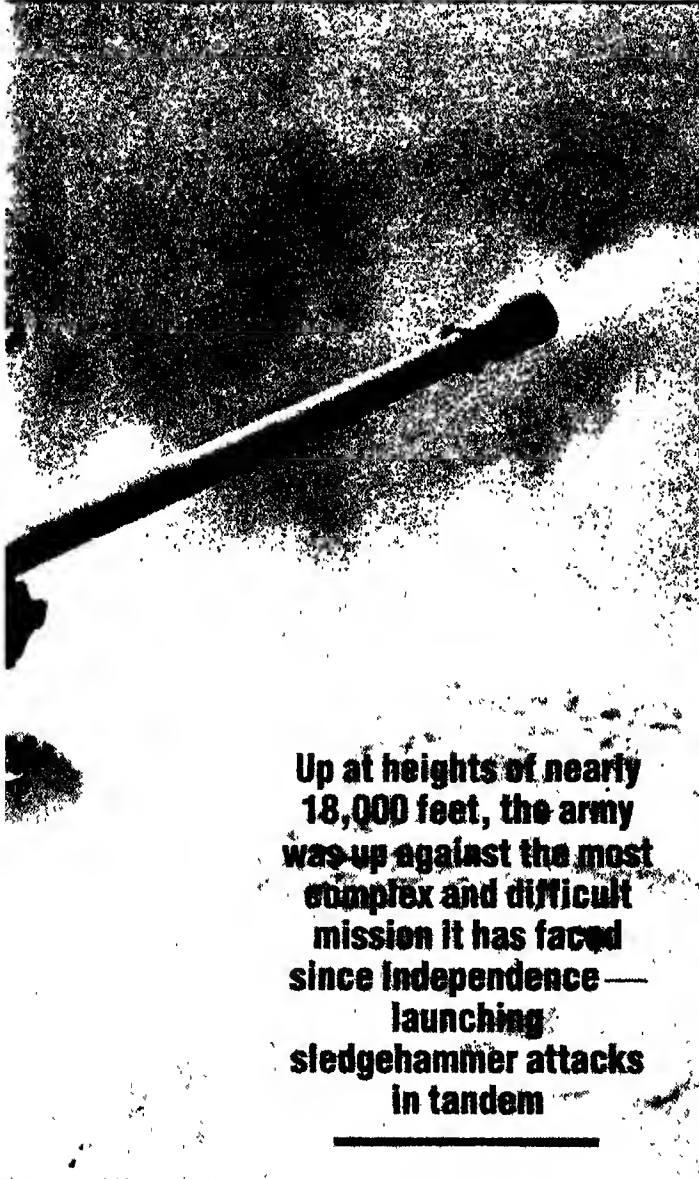
Being key sectors both Dras and Batalik had to be cleared first. Up at heights nearly 18,000 feet, the army was up against the most complex and difficult mission it has faced since Independence — launching sledgehammer attacks in tandem.

KEY BATTLES

First capturing neighbouring ground on heights equivalent to those occupied by the enemy, understanding mountaintops and grasping enemy intention and plans were key to victory. Tiger Hill and Point 4875 in Dras, and Jubar, Khalubar and Point 5203 in Batalik unhinged enemy defences and intrusions in these sectors.

s Won Back

JAGDISH YADAV



Up at heights of nearly 18,000 feet, the army was up against the most complex and difficult mission it has faced since independence — launching sledgehammer attacks in tandem



George Fernandes: intrusions in Kargil were suspected when he visited Siachen last May

Spurs from Tiger Hill and Tololing which were recaptured placed jawans behind Mashkoh and Kaksar. This unnerved the enemy. Also, unnerving for him was India's stunning successes and the unstoppable moments of onslaught. After Tiger Hill, it was the deluge.

THE WHITE FLAG

Running short of water, supplies,

motivation and morale, the Pakistani will to fight cracked when news of the 'appeal' for withdrawal reached them. Confusion was compounded by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's declaration of victory on 10 July. This was a first strike in psy-war.

Not only did Pakistani officers at places abandon their soldiers, they also abandoned their dead, worse disowned them. This is an even greater ignominy

than rout and retreat.

The last time Pakistani soldiers showed the white flag was in Dhaka in 1971. Twenty-eight years later, he has waved it again in Kargil. Now, as then, the story is repeating — tales of Pakistani barbarity reciprocated by civilized and dignified Indian military behaviour. Pakistani army mutilated and fouled the Indian dead. Indian army buried their dead with full military honours.

COVER STORY

But Pakistani intruders were given an exit corridor and a qualified ceasefire; no air, artillery and mortar strikes in Mashkoh and Kaksar. The Indians advanced reclaiming ground right up to the LoC as the Pakistanis fled. It is not in the jawan's ethos and culture to shoot at a withdrawing enemy.

The army is jubilant and angry. Its morale is sky-high. It has taught Pakistan a second lesson in this half century. The anger is over the necessary but qualified ceasefire. But soldiers have to remember that sometimes it is prudent to win part of the war without fighting it, not the least because it saved lives.

HIGHER DIRECTION OF WAR

The government gave a simple task to the armed forces —eviction of intrusions and restoration of LoC without

chiefs were consulted and or informed at each stage before any political or diplomatic initiative was taken. Operation Vijay is really a triumph of politico-military diplomacy with the military in the driving seat.

CONDUCT OF BATTLE

Air-land operations in the mountains took time to jell. Never before had offensive air operations been integrated with low intensity conflict. In-fight innovation and adaptation of IAF tactics sharpened the sting of air strikes. For the IAF this was its first live experience in close support of the army in the mountains. It allowed the testing of different aircraft, attack techniques and employment of precision-guided weapons. Jointmanship came to the fore during attacks on Tiger Hill and other major attacks

JAGDISH YADAV



Jawans of the Rajputana Rifles displaying captured Pakistani arms

crossing it. The government also gave a free hand to Gen. V.P. Malik, chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee to fight the campaign with no pressure of time or other riders. Some diversion was sought to be created by opposition parties by drawing a distinction between the army and the government. This was resented by the army high command.

The cabinet committee on security attended by the service chiefs met regularly, at times on a daily basis. The

Artillery has worked wonders with its equipment and observation post officers despite the deficiency of gun-locating radars. The Bofors has proved a battle-winner. Along with the multi-barrel rocketlauncher, 105 mm IFG, these guns have been used in direct fire at enemy hideouts. Nearly 70 per cent of casualties on both sides are due to artillery (see *Gunner's story elsewhere in the issue*).

Infantry, the queen of battle has lived

up to its title, rolling back intrusions with finesse and fire. The infantry jawan has again proved he's a rare blend of royalty, son of the soil and salt of the earth. Nothing more needs to be said of him.

The air-ground campaign fought in Kargil will go down as epic battles in the high mountains against extreme odds. Everester Santosh Yadav was right volunteering to guide *jawans* on to Tiger Hill, so stiff are the heights.

PEOPLE AND MEDIA SUPPORT

This war would not have been won in record time as it has been without the combined support of the people and the media. This is quite unprecedented

DIPLOMACY

The decision of the government backed by the armed forces not to cross the LoC was the trump-card. The display of restraint in the face of aggression and provocation have reinforced India's bonafides as a responsible, rational, nuclear-weapons state. In sharp contrast, Pakistan has won its badge as a rogue and irrational state, routed diplomatically by an irresponsible army.

Continuing the Lahore process must be contingent upon Pakistan's assurance to respect the LoC in future after restoring it in full bow.

CHINA TAPES

This was an intelligence coup by R&AW. Anyone who has studied intercepts of telephone conversations between army chief Gen. Pervez Musharraf in Beijing and his chief of general staff, Lt. Gen. Mohammad Aziz in Islamabad would have known the losing game Pakistan army was playing with India especially after it failed to cut the Leh road and seize Zojila Pass.

POSTSCRIPT

To the several prophets of doom in India who violated the LoC intellectually, votaries of crossing the LoC, supporters of the Bleeding India-vietnams syndrome and Kargil-is-a-bigger-Siachen, conscientious objectors of 'safe passage and Kebob Diplomacy', all one can suggest is what the proverbial *ustad* tells the *jawan* look before you leap (especially in the mountains). •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta /New Delhi

In collusion

The Pakistan Army and the Sharif government are working in close concert



As Nawaz Sharif flies back home after signing the joint statement with Bill Clinton in Washington and paying court to Tony Blair in London, the likely scenario of the diplomatic manoeuvring over Kargil is becoming clear. Let no Indian diplomacy underestimate the challenges it will face.

By now the Pakistani Prime Minister knows that he has to abide by the commitments he has made to the US President, particularly about the Pakistani withdrawals from our side of the Line of Control (LoC). The remarks of the Pakistani Army chief, General Musharraf, as quoted by the hard-line newspaper *Jung* (War), also indicate that the army and the Sharif government, as always, are working in close concert. In any case, it is known now that before



Nawaz Sharif meets Bill Clinton at Washington to discuss the Kashmir issue

suddenly taking off for Washington, Nawaz had a long meeting with Musharraf.

If the army chief falls in line, can intelligence agencies, especially the notorious ISI, be far behind? There is no doubt that the rabid Islamists, such as the Jamat-e-Islami, Lashkar-e-Torba, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen et al, will raise hell. They are already doing so. But most of these wild outfits subsist on the generosity of the Pakistan government, the Pakistan Army and the ISI, and are bound to do what they are told.

That is where the heavy spin that is being put on the climb-down in Washington comes in. Sartaj Aziz, the Pakistani foreign minister, has already started proclaiming that the 'freedom-fighters' now in Kargil have 'achieved their objective of internationalising Kashmir'. They can, therefore, afford to come back. In this context Pakistan will continue to maintain the pretence (which no one in his sense anywhere in the wide world believes) that Islamabad has no control over the 'freedom fighters' occupying the strategic heights in the Dras-Kargil-Batalik region.

The bulk of these invaders are Pakistani regulars, in any

case. So the Pakistani version that the 'freedom-fighters' might or might not heed its appeal is unlikely to be bought by anyone. At the very least, until withdrawals are seen to be taking place and quickly enough, Nawaz will be in trouble with Clinton. After all, the prestige of the US and its President is also at stake if Islamabad can violate the 'Washington agreement', to use Tony Blair's words, with impunity.

The Nawaz government, and its spin doctors, are thus bound to adjust their tactics accordingly. As soon as withdrawals begin, even in dribbles, they whine to Washington that the US should ask India for immediate cessation of hostilities, and the President should promote the dialogue on Kashmir 'expeditiously'.

Normally there should be no fear that New Delhi would fall into this trap. But past experience, combined with the present confusion, all too frequently caused by different ministers of the Vajpayee caretaker Cabinet talking in different voices, does cause apprehensions. This danger will have to be guarded against. Only after the last of the invaders has gone can there be a cease-fire.

About the second, and more long-term, Pakistani tactic, there never has been any doubt. One of the main purposes of the Kargil outrage was to reopen the Siachen issue. If the Pakistani military action could isolate the brigade defending the glacier in the shadow of the Saltoro range, so much the better. But since the Indian Army has defeated this gameplan, the fight is being shifted to the diplomatic arena.

On this score Pakistan can draw some comfort from the working of the statement jointly issued by Clinton and Sharif. It commits Pakistan to respecting fully the LoC, 'established in accordance with the 1972 Shimla Agreement'. Sartaj Aziz has already started screaming that the LoC has been delineated only up to Point NJ 9842, and therefore Indian troops have no right to be in Siachen, where they weren't at the time of the Shimla Agreement.

There are many, not merely in the outside world but also in India, who might argue that Islamabad has a valid point. But that is far from being the case. The LoC was delineated in 1972 only up to Point NJ 9842 because of the basis of the exercise. It was that the cease-fire line of 1949 should first be converted into LoC and its new delineation agreed to, because unlike in the case of areas across the international border which were vacated by both sides, each side was to keep the territory won in 1971 across the cease-fire line. That is how Pakistan got Thaku Chak and this country a number of areas, including the Kargil heights now being fought over.

Nothing was said in 1972 about the areas beyond NJ 9842 for the simple reason that no fighting had taken place there. The original provisions of the 1949 agreement continued to apply. These were that beyond this point the 'line goes northwards to the glaciers'. The two sides can delineate this 110 km line now. Or they can sign and implement the 1992 draft agreement to demilitarise the Siachen region. However, either option can be exercised only after the Kargil aggression is undone. •

Kapil Dev's call for a boycott of sports with Pakistan was inevitable



At last Kapil Dev Nihang is one up on Sunny Gavaskar. He has jumped ahead from the sports pages to front pages as well as editorial columns

of the dailies. Not bad for someone who could not even locate the *gobi* inside the refrigerator! Kapil's call for a boycott of sporting activities with Pakistan is now big news. The hawks inside and outside the government are delighted. I would not be surprised if some of the political parties offered tickets to the Haryana cricket star for the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Most sections of the media, while regretting the mixing up of sport with politics felt that the decision was inevitable. *The Asian Age* pointed out that while cricket and the popular arts may, at different levels, be a great uniting force between Indians and Pakistanis, the pretty picture changes when the two countries are ranged against each other in a state of war. Cricketers from India and Pakistan are good friends. Yet when they clash on the cricket field, there is tremendous tension in both the countries. In the backdrop of the present situation, the tension could escalate further.

An editorial in *The Hindu*, 'Cricket and War,' explained that the motives of someone like Kapil Dev could not be questioned. Unfortunately, Kapil's views had been endorsed by people like the Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray whose antipathy to any Indo-Pakistan cultural or sporting links is well-known. I am sure Kapil himself would find it uncomfortable to be bracketed with the Sena chief. *The Hindu* pointed out that in the same editorial in the *Saamna* (Sena mouthpiece) where Thackeray lauded Kapil, he also questioned the patriotism of activist film star, Shabana Azmi, her poet husband Javed Akhtar, while demanding that thespian Dilip Kumar return the Nishan-e-Pakistan award.

This issue was well-handled by the *Indian Express* in an edit, *The War Chic*. Discussing the fate of the Sahara Cup,

PATRIOT

KAPIL DEV



the edit pointed out that it was all about the expressions of patriotism, about 'issues' that served the nation. "Who can diller, who can afford to be anti-national, when the nation is at war? Be prepared for the parade of more issues. It may very well be the bus. What did the bus achieve? Our Prime Minister was conned. Cancel the bloody bus. Such murmurs are already in the air."

The mocking tone of the *Express* editorial, I felt, hit the spot. Thackeray now questions the patriotism of Dilip Kumar. "Do we need this manufactured patriotism, this obligatory nationalism? No, we don't. It may be very nation-friendly to activate the enemy-feeling by issuing safe issues and causes. It is also very tempting because you rarely get a chance to express your national credentials." The paper is entirely right when it mentioned that those who were eager to pass the national test were actually shopping in the paranoiamarket. 'Paranoiamarket'

-- yes, those are the dangerous words. The present crisis is an example of a modern nation state, waging a defensive war against a democratically underdeveloped, militarily reckless neighbour. "This war has the nation's fulsome endorsement. Slowly and steadily, this war is reaching its logical conclusion, without the aid of frenzy and mobilisation." I only hope that the likes of Bal Thackeray read this edit.

Change of guards

I agree that when a government was fighting a war thrust upon it, it needed the support of the people. But how can a government defeated on the floor of Parliament and holding power till the next elections continue to take major decisions which had nothing to do with the war? This is simply unethical. Obsessed with the war coverage, the media is not paying enough attention to these sly

GAMES



BAL THACKERAY

Unfortunately, Kapil Dev's views had been endorsed by people like the Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray whose antipathy to any Indo-Pakistan cultural or sporting links is well-known

Dilip Kumar: his patriotism is being questioned



daiji, had brought India to the brink of war against Pakistan during the Operation Brasstacks exercise

The Statesman questioned the propriety of law minister Ram Jethmalani appointing his old crony and junior, S.B. Jaisinghani, as the new solicitor-general. According to a front-page report in the paper, Jaisinghani was not a senior advocate of any High Court and his practice was confined to certain criminal matters. "His career is said to be marked by no particular distinction and he has been generally led by a senior." Why was Ramji in such a hurry to appoint the crony? Couldn't this appointment be held back till the polls were over and a new government came in power?

Masala Mix

Times reporters are experts in covering human rights and heritage issues. I

deals *The Times of India* did well to point out that while the government exhorted the public to donate generously to various public funds for the support and welfare of the *Jawans*, it blithely threw away Rs 1500 crore by introducing a new telecom policy. A stumbling caretaker government first shifted Mr Jagmohan, an upright and stern minister from communications and brought the ministry under the Prime Minister directly. The new policy clearly favoured the telecom giants and telecom operators who had defaulted on their financial commitment to the government to the tune of more than Rs 500 crore — which can buy a lot of Bofors shells and also help our *Jawans*.

The Hindustan Times questioned the peculiar appointment of Arun Singh as a special executive assistant in the ministry of external affairs. Foreign minister Jaswant Singh told the paper's Kalyani Shankar that Arun Singh's appointment

was not a political move. Arun Singh, an old friend, had volunteered to work in any capacity, did not seek any office and the minister requested Singh to work with him. How touching! Jaswant Singh told Mr Shankar, "The external affairs ministry has a very significant role to play in managing national security along with the defence ministry." Can't this be done by career officers within the ministry? As the *HT* editorial rightly pointed out, Arun Singh's appointment conveyed an impression that the minister needed help on the foreign policy front at a time when he should be firmly in charge of the situation. "How does someone who had no experience in foreign affairs get to occupy a powerful, ill-defined position in the ministry of external affairs?" asked the editorial and went on to point out that as the minister of state for defence in Rajiv Gandhi's government, Arun Singh, along with the then Army Chief of Staff, General Sun-

hope some of them look inwards and try to save one of its heritages, the edit page. It is becoming more and more unreadable and deals with non-issues and non-persons. The Question and Answer columns too often feature Bollywood people who say nothing of importance. Most of the interviews are quite silly and feature inane, irrelevant questions. "You are planning to release *Mast* at the same time as Sooraj Barjatya's new musical *Hum Saath Saath Hum*. Doesn't that make you apprehensive?" (a question put to producer-director Ram Gopal Varma). "Why a hoarding of *Taal* in Toronto?" Subhash Ghai was asked!

The decline in the *Times* edit page which began with the departure of Girfal Jain is now more pronounced. While variety is important, should the once prestigious page descend to stale Bollywood news? There is too much of *Filmfare* on the *TOI* edit page. •

M.L. Jaisimha

1939 — 1999

The match was over. The day was done. But a lone figure would continue standing on the balcony, leaning over the rails to survey the pitch that was his world. Later, he would drive home to his well-stocked bar and muse over the past. With friends and acquaintances of the present.

And yes. He would flip open his packet of cigarettes. He couldn't do without them — to the extent of becoming adviser to a tobacco company late in his life. Finally, it was perhaps his love for "the obnoxious weed" that did him in.

Motaganahalli Laxminarasu Jaisimha was born in 1939. A full 60 years later, he died on 7 July of cancer, an ailment he hid from his family for months, until a friend forced him to seek medical aid. He asked his wife Jum for a cigarette the day before he died. She gave it to him, knowing it could be his last. And indeed it was.

Sunil Manohar Gavaskar, hearing of his condition, had flown down from Bombay to see him. But Gavaskar's Hyderabad hero was too far gone to recognise the former India captain.

Jaisimha brought "style" to cricket. His unruffled demeanour, easy gait and the upturned collar evoked an image of supreme confidence. And that's what prompted the Maharajkumar of Vizianagaram to announce his entry with "Jai Simha" — hail the lion!

He was the quintessential cricketer of the Sixties — stylish, devil-may-care and yet a man who could deliver when required. Fellow musketeers of his time, as they were called, were Tiger Pataudi, Abbas Ali Baig, Budhu Kunderan and Salim Durrani. These were the men who made women flock in droves to watch the game.

Like many cricketers of his age, Jaisimha came from an aristocratic family where sport was an honourable hobby. In the beginning, he struggled to choose between cricket, tennis and badminton. Finally, Ghulam Ahmed, the legendary off-spinner and captain, claimed him for his own. And so began his cricket career in 1954 at the age of 15.

The statistics of his 17-year-long career aren't impressive. A debut at Lord's, 1,056 runs from 39 Tests — an average



of 30.68 runs and three centuries.

In the 1967-68 series against Australia, Jar was dropped from the team. Peeved with the selectors he decided to quit. Till Chandrashekhari was injured. Though India lost, Jar scored a personal victory with 74 and 101 runs in the two innings.

There were times he could anchor the innings as well. Like in the 1960 match against the Aussies led by Richie Benaud. In what is a record of sorts, he played on all five days of the Calcutta Test. He came in at No. 9 nearing the end of Day 1, remained 20 not out on Day 2, came back at number 4 for the second innings on Day 3 and was eventually out at lunch time on Day 5.

He quit after the 1971 tour of West Indies, which incidentally, was also India's

first win against them. This is also the only time Gavaskar — Jar's great fan — played with him.

His sons — Vivek, who like his father captained Hyderabad and Vidut — were both good cricketers. But neither reached the height their father attained, especially as captain. Followers of the game feel he would have made an ideal captain. He certainly was the best captain that India never had.

He quit playing but he could not quit the game. He came home to Hyderabad cricket as selector, adviser and coach and helped it reach the Ranji Trophy semi-finals twice in 1997-98 and this year.

He was buried with his 1959 cricket blazer wrapped around him. •

Arijit Sen with Sarita Rani

TAMIL NADU

Pass or fail?

M. Karunanidhi prepares a progress report on the performance of his MLAs

Unlike Jayalalitha, Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi does not believe that his party's MLAs and MPs should make themselves prostrate in front of him or that they should praise him to the high heavens. It appears that Karunanidhi, instead, has a more scientific approach and believes in surveys and field investigations to achieve his goals. During a DMK conclave last month, the CM fished out a two-page report card on his 171 MLA's. The report, prepared by an independent professional organisation, evaluated the performance of DMK MLAs in the last three years.

With this move, the Tamil Nadu chief minister has notched up many firsts. For the first time in DMK's history, and perhaps for the first time for any political party in the country, Karunanidhi had appointed an independent professional body to evaluate the performance of his party's MLAs in the state. According to a senior DMK functionary: "With Lok Sabha elections round the corner and Assembly elections hardly two years away, we had to evaluate the performance of our MLAs and what people think of them." The party functionary pointed out that whatever be the nature of the electoral alliance, there will always be a strong undercurrent of resentment among the average voter if the performance of an MLA or an MP is not upto the mark.

The report card lists the state government's achievements in the past three years in the respective constituencies, the grievances of the local people, the demands and schemes which could be implemented in the constituencies and the performance of respective MLAs. In fact, the report card of a particular MLA pointed out that he was "siding with the administration and working against public interest". Jotted down beside the name of another MLA was the remark: "You hardly visit your constituency, you are not making any effort to solve the problem of the people."

No doubt, MLAs who, according to the chief ministerial report card, have flunked have become furious. "Whoever did the survey has visited only three places in each constituency and how can they do a fair assessment?" asked one of them angrily. Some have also demanded a revaluation of their progress report.

It appears that these MLAs have little to worry about. This is because even some of the ministers have not been spared. The report is believed to have warned a particular minister that his son and wife are said to be interfering too much in the activities of his department. Based on the observations made in the report, Karunanidhi is believed to have given a dressing down to a couple of his ministers.

But who were the ones sitting in judgement? The rumour mill has it that retired officers from the state intelligence



HARD TASKMASTER: Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi

department have been drafted specially for the job. They have fanned out across the state, visited all the 171 constituencies won by the party in the 1996 Assembly elections and came back with a detailed and candid appraisal of each MLA's performance.

The two-page report card was handed over by chief minister Karunanidhi personally to the MLA's. Said a party MP: "It is done in a professional manner and has to be welcomed. There was no bias in the progress card." According to sources in the DMK, the evaluation report of the MLA's is likely to be fed into a computer.

Taking a leaf out of Karunanidhi's evaluation of his MLA's, it is rumoured that Jayalalitha has also appointed a professional agency to evaluate the chances of her 18 MP's in the next Lok Sabha elections. Constituency surveys, opinion polls and report cards are likely to be the new weapons of political oneupmanship among parties in Tamil Nadu. •

Sreedhar Pillai/Madras

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Capital gains

Rural women emerge as successful entrepreneurs in West Bengal

When women get down to business, money usually begins to talk. That's the truth emerging from the heart of rural West Bengal, where women, in many places, have banded together to make some honest money.

They have formed little groups which one may even call micro-companies, and the successful ones are making enough money to lift entire families well above the poverty line. And behind this entrepreneurial zeal of a people that has traditionally fought shy of 'money' and 'profits' is a central scheme — Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas, in short, DOWCRA — being implemented by the District Rural Development Agencies in the state.

The scheme is devoid of the spectacular and is based on down-to-earth ideas that have made it practicable and most cases a success. The scheme is worked by a simple formula in which in 15 women belonging to families below the poverty line decide on a business venture and pool in a fixed sum of money every month to raise the seed money. The individual contribution can be as minimal as Rs 10-15, but the fund created within six months entitles them to a matching grant from the government. The corpus then serves as the group's capital, which keeps growing if the venture succeeds.

Tekatul is a small hamlet in the lush green district of Jalpaiguri in northern West Bengal. The state's northern districts, together referred to as North Bengal, has remained backward because of poor and erratic communication. But in Tekatul, the members of a DOWCRA group that runs a successful sericulture business earn about Rs 1,000 per month.

Usha Kar, the leader of the group, vividly remembers the times before they had embarked on this venture. "We have very little farm land, so life was very tough," she recalls. "Now we have enough money to send our children to school and even save for their future."



REAPING PROFITS: poultry workers of Balarampur

One hears similar stories from Renuka Dey and Lakshmi Sarkar, leaders of DOWCRA groups in Cooch Behar district, considered the back of beyond in West Bengal.

The group that Renuka heads specialises in making a traditional cane mat that is one of Cooch Behar's more famous handicrafts. The mat, locally known as *sital paati* because of its cooling effect in summer, is a costly yet sought-after product made from a special variety of cane that grows abundantly in the district. The intricately woven mats can take as much as a month to make and could cost anywhere between Rs 1,500-2,000.

Local artisans have been making these mats for eons, but

Moving experience

Former Union minister Subodh Kant Sahay organises a medical aid camp in Ranchi

No doubt it was a populist exercise before the elections. But it was worthwhile. At the end of the 18-day medical aid camp in Ranchi, this has been the refrain among people who had given up all hope of leading a normal life.

The moving force behind the camp was former Union minister of state for home, and AICC member, Subodh Kant Sahay. Having lived in relative isolation so far as politics is concerned, Sahay is now hellbent on eradicating physical disabilities of people in the Jharkhand region. Pitching in was Jaipur-based Bhagwan Mahavir Viklang Sahayata Samiti.

It was Sahay who, during his ministerial tenure, had recommended the Samiti for Padmashree. It was now the Samiti's turn to do a good turn by holding the camp in the tribal-dominated Jharkhand region in south Bihar. The

this is the first time that a women's group has adopted it as its line of business. All the members of this group from a village called Ghugumari once lived below poverty line and nearly half of them were illiterate. Today, all can read and write and the team has built up a corpus of Rs 55,000 even while giving away Rs 300 per month to each of the group's 13 members.

How do they spend the money they earn? "Mostly on children's education," says Lakshmi Sarkar of Ghugumari. Her son runs a small tea shop, but her own income has made a world of difference to the family. She wants to draw her daughter-in-law into mat-making, hoping that her grandchildren will get a better chance to study once the extra income flows in.

Lakshmi Das, leader of a group running a poultry farm at Balarampur village not far from Ghugumari, expressed similar sentiments. This group started off with ten members contributing Rs 10 per month. Their miniscule farm got off the ground with just 25 chicks; today, Lakshmi and her girls look after 300 birds, earn Rs 300 per month and have notched up a tidy capital of Rs 25,000. And the money is still growing.

"I want to build a better house, eat better food, make sure my son is able to study beyond the Madhyamik level, and insure against future uncertainties," says Sadhana Kar, one of the more vocal members of the farm. The women work in shifts, keep an watchful eye on their delicate stock and are constantly in touch with the local vet to guard against any outbreak of epidemic.

There are 921 and 154 such DOWCRA groups in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar, say B.C. Burman and Alok Sanyal, project officers in the two districts. Nearly 50 per cent of the groups in Jalpaiguri have succeeded says Barman, while in neighbouring Cooch Behar, project officer Sanyal is slightly more conservative about the success rate. "Groups in which

the team spirit is high are doing well," he says.

What is remarkable is that all the three groups SUNDAY met were eager to diversify. While two were already engaged in supplying food in addition to their main line of business, the poultry farmers of Balarampur were keen to set up a dairy. "And if that doesn't work out, we would like to make and sell chicken and cattle feed," said Sadhana Kar.

"DOWCRA is a two-pronged programme," explained Mingma Bhutia, assistant project officer, Jalpaiguri. "It is supposed to yield both economic and social benefits." And gains in the social balance sheet are indeed quite substantial.

The personalities of the women have been dramatically transformed. They are confident, vocal, assertive and take their own decisions.

"Their status in their families have changed," says Soma Gangopadhyay, assistant project officer, Cooch Behar. "Their husbands give them more importance and consult them before taking any important decision."

And as literacy is a precondition for joining a DOWCRA group, the mental horizon of these women have opened up. "I am not afraid of talking to officers any more," says Sadhana. "If I have a problem or a proposal, I can just walk up to them and tell them what I want."

The floodgates of initiative appears to have been thrown open, at least in the case of some. And as they realise and pursue what is good for them, they show a clear bias for small families and education. "A son or a daughter? The sex doesn't matter any more. We now realise that both are equally good," says Usha Kar, whose husband is saving for their son, and she for their daughter.

Clearly, there are things that money does to the mind, and often they are good. •

Anish Gupta/Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar

camp was organised to distribute artificial limbs free-of-cost.

Between 16 June and 3 July, the makeshift 'fitness' centre at Ranchi's Mahatma Gandhi Hall became a buzz of activity. Around 4,500 artificial limbs, crutches, wheel-chairs and tricycles were distributed to people who could

DOING A GOOD TURN: Subodh Kant Sahay



not bear the cost of these instruments. These artificial prostheses gave a new lease of life to people who had virtually given up the idea of ever moving again.

For the beneficiaries of the camp, it was no doubt a moving experience. Raghuveer Choudhary had lost his leg in an accident way back in 1971. Speaking to SUNDAY, a visibly-moved Choudhary revealed his tales of gratitude. Similar sentiments were revealed by Riva, a B.Sc student from Sasaram College, who had lost her leg in an accident when she was barely three. "A single artificial leg costs Rs 5,000 in the market. I had to reconcile myself to go without a leg and had been limping on crutches because I didn't have the money for anything better," Riva pointed out.

The kind of difference the aid camp made to the lives of the disabled was palpable. On the concluding day, an old man was seen staggering on to the dais even without help from anyone. Even a few days back, the same man could not walk as both his legs were out of action.

At the end of the camp, Sahay said that he simply wanted to see every person standing on their own feet by the end of this century. He was also playing his card with finesse. "Look at this Maulana. He was unable to move even a single step as he lost his both legs in an accident. Now he is marching like a soldier," Sahay pointed out.

What was in store for Sahay at the end of it all? A standing ovation, and appreciation, even from his political adversaries. •

B.P. Sharan/Ranchi

The real thing

Docu-drama is the new rage on the tube

Docu-drama seems to be the thing of the moment. Two new prime-time shows, *Missing* on Sony and *Agnichakra* on Zee, are indicative of the genre's growing popularity. *India's Most Wanted* begun on Zee last year soon became the channel's most watched programmes and *Bhanwar*, which Sony started with some trepidation and not too much advertising, was also quick to attract a diverse audience — from middle-aged laides in *bastis* to the well-heeled urban sophisticate.

Missing, as the name suggests, focuses on the stories of those who go missing. We've all known or heard of people who, inexplicably, vanish. Some walk out of unhappy marriages and other domestic situations; others leave for reasons best known to themselves.

Directed by Ken Ghosh and anchored by Jackie Shroff, *Missing* tries to piece the tale together by talking to those that were left behind, concerned police officials and organisations. The effect could be startling. During last week's



CAT AND MOUSE: India's Most Wanted

episode, a doctor who'd been missing for several years called in after watching the first part of the programme to say that he'd gone of his own free will, was well, but had no intention of coming back home.

Jackie Shroff does an emotive job of fronting the show. But there's something missing from it — it's a little drab and somewhat disconnected. We're not advocating *IMW*-style melodrama whose braveheart anchorman Sohaib Ilyasi chases criminals at breathless speed. We're asking for a little more feeling which would bring us closer to the characters, a quality that the best of *Bhanwar* displays.

Agnichakra, produced by the once-again prolific Vinta Nanda, re-creates criminal cases, solved and unsolved, with the intention of underlining the futility of such action. The first episode was about two boys who run away from home, lose their money, and unwillingly, commit a murder. It was effective, if a little too loud. •

ASSAM

Security threat?

A human rights worker is held under NSA for issuing a statement on Kashmir

The undeclared war in Kargil has had a strange fall out in the north-east. Asish Gupta, a journalist and human rights activist, has been put behind bars for issuing a press release on the Kargil conflict.

Asish Gupta, 43, is the secretary-general of the North-east Coordination Committee on Human Rights (NECOHR) and editor of the Assamese magazine *Bitarka*. According to B. Goswami, chairman of Manab Adhikar Sangram Samity (MASS), a human rights organisation of Assam, he was held for having issued a NECOHR communique on 5 June at Imphal.

The statement demanded an end to the war and said, "NECOHR strongly believes that only Kashmiri people have the right to decide their own future and this is not in the hands of India or Pakistan to interfere in this decision."

After he returned to Guwahati, Gupta was called to the Chandmani police station for interrogation on 10 June, following which he was allowed to go home. But he was asked to come again the next day.

When he went to the police station for the second time, he was told that there were instructions from higher officials to detain him. He was arrested and sent to the Guwahati District Jail on 12 June under judicial custody. Later, he was booked under the National Security Act.

According to Goswami, the police had questioned him mainly regarding the press statement. He was also charged with publishing an article by a leader of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA).

The MASS chairman, who was in Calcutta to participate in an all-India seminar on civil liberties organised by the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) on 3 and 4 June, claimed that Gupta's arrest followed a "pattern of harassment" of human rights activists in Assam. He gave several recent instances.

On 4 April, Nripen Sarma, chairman of the Patacharkuchi unit of MASS, was allegedly killed by the police. On 8 June, Amaol Konwar, secretary of the Melamara unit of MASS and the reporter of a local daily, was arrested in Golaghat district.

Goswami alleged that some "secret killers" had also been targeting human rights workers. On 27 April, they picked up Nabin Tamuli, adviser of the Tinsukia district of MASS, from his house. He remains untraced till now.

The first victim of the "secret killers" had been Parag Kumar Das, the founder secretary-general of MASS and editor of the daily, *Asomiya Pratidin*. He was assassinated when he went to pick up his son from school.

In a report published in May, MASS commented, "The deliberate targeting of human rights defenders worsen the already serious human rights situation in the state." It also complained that "in this situation, MASS has repeatedly knocked the doors of state judiciary and the state and national commissions on human rights, but failed to get any satisfactory response." •

Nilanjan Dutta/Calcutta



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 18 JULY, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

The good intentions of so-called friends shouldn't be taken for granted. Acquaintances may be cultivating more intimacy with you for dubious motives. If you feel that such people are snooping or going too far in their inquiries regarding your private affair, it is best to call a halt.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

It is not the best time for finalizing property transactions. By waiting for some more time, hidden problems may emerge that could even make you change your mind completely. Unscrupulous people may attempt to pull the wool over your eyes. Contacts in the business world are more likely to break.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

You should not get carried away by the implications of actions performed by people in authority. They are quite likely to reverse previous rulings, or act in erratic and unpredictable ways. Tax and insurance affairs should be dealt with promptly. Problems will only multiply if you put aside these matters.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

You can make an excellent impression on influential people. Lucrative deals can be forged with multinationals or other big commercial companies. Now is the time when your past efficiency and current reputation can stand you in a good stead.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

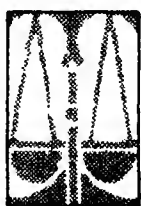
You should be feeling in control of things and on top of the world. Your cheerful mood can be infectious. Certainly people in positions of power and authority should respond well to your positive approach. You can now win influential allies and support.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

You will probably be carried along on a wave of excitement and enthusiasm. It should certainly be easier to convince others of the viability of your plans and projects. In fact, you may be overwhelmed with offers of support and active assistance for current schemes and undertakings.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

Cautious and patience can bring benefits. Do not rely on your own limited knowledge and experience in legal affairs. Influential people may try to fob you off with empty words or phoney promises. Showing off in front of business or professional colleagues will do nothing for your reputation.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

If you have lagged behind schedule at work, there should be opportunities for catching up. Or, there may be the chance to increase earnings. It may be necessary to embellish the facts or tell white lies in an attempt to make people sit up and listen. This may be the only way you can draw attention to pressing issues.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

People in key positions probably will not mind being disturbed if there is a pressing need to speak to them on an urgent issue. But even though this is the case, you may do well to try to handle emergencies or other situations by yourself. Family members appear to be in a spirit of agreement and goodwill.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

You probably do not need anyone else to tell you how finely balanced your financial situation is. A couple of mistakes or miscalculations could bring the whole works crashing down. You simply cannot allow yourself the luxuries of doing business.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

Leave as little to chance as possible where journeys are concerned. It will be easier to tread on the toes of loved ones. Be more sensitive to their feelings and needs. Casual flirtations are likely to fizzle out almost before they have begun.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

Make sure you do nothing to further irritate grumpy family members. You will receive little thanks for trying to take such people out of gloom. Unexpected hold-ups and complications can bedevil business activities.

Pipped to the post

Major changes are tipped to take place in the Central Board of Customs and Excise.

Although the current chairman, S.D. Mohile, has a year left for his term, he may



Shatrughan Sinha: backing the dark horse

be sent back and another chairman appointed. The question is who. The senior-most is B.P. Verma, but there is speculation that he may be pipped to the post by someone four places junior to him.

The likely candidate, A.M. Prasad, currently member (personnel), has the backing of several BJP members from Bihar, including Shatrughan Sinha. The finance minister is also from Bihar. Expect the changes to take place any time.

Power game

So the problems over the captaincy of the World Trade Organisation are being ironed out with the Thai and the Australian candidates virtually agreeing to share the four-year term.

But Supachai Panitchpakdi, the Thai candidate, has put a spoke in the wheel. He

HEARD AT FICCI

The real socialists are the Congress: judging by their insistent demand that the government call a Rajya Sabha session

AN INDUSTRIALIST

says a two-year term is not enough for any WTO chief to do much. Also, he wants to know clearly which half of the term he will hold — because the second term is the one where you can position your people and argue for an extension.

Doesn't this sound like Indian politicians quarrelling? Power politics doesn't change.

KNOW YOUR INDUSTRIAL HOUSE

Starting a new series

Essar

■ **What the group does:** An industrial conglomerate with interests in steel, shipping, oil & gas, power and telecommunications.

■ **What isn't doing well:** Essar steel began with the best possible intentions — entering a core area just when government liberalised — and briefly, even did well.

But then there was massive expansion of capacity, not enough of a market and a crash in international steel prices. Combined with an industrial recession in India, Essar desperately began casting around for help. Its finances went into a tailspin.

Now, the group is in the process of restructuring itself so that it stays creditworthy.

■ **What is:** Essar Telecom, if it is given half a chance by the government. Because of the enormous confusion over the telecom policy, private telecom companies have lost a lot of initiative and money.

However, Essar has a collaboration with Swisscom in the cellular sector and holds licences for both basic and cellular services for an important sector in India. But this will take time.

■ **The leadership:** The Ruia family are the leading lights. They were involved in some controversy recently because an official in the finance ministry was said to be in league with them. However, if they don't keep sending all their profits abroad, they might be able to retrieve their group from the red zone.

But when?

A worthy successor is being appointed to a post held by N.K. Singh.

S. Sundareshan, joint secretary in the department of economic affairs, was brought to the Centre during



N.K. Singh: leaving a vacuum

the United Front government by G.K. Moopanar.

He is now being appointed minister (economic affairs) at the Indian mission in Tokyo, a job once held by Singh. Sundareshan is a fine officer, known for his integrity.

The question is when will this vacancy be filled. The government has a candidate, but he is too junior. And it is possible that the post may be kept vacant until this officer is empanelled. •

For papa's sake

■ In contrast to Kapil Dev, Ajay Jadeja will definitely campaign for papa Daulat Singh Jadeja's election. The senior Jadeja has already been a Lok Sabha MP from the Congress for three terms.

The only problem is that this time the Congress is more inclined to give the seat to Ajay. When this suggestion was put to Ajay, he threw up his hands in alarm.



Ajay Jadeja: another ball game

Oh, but I want to be captain of the Indian cricket team, he cried, not an MP in the Lok Sabha.

In any case, the general impression is that the son will have to work hard if the father wants to win, because without Ajay's campaign, the Congress has no chance of winning the seat.

Beyond control?

■ How to handle Kargil is a major problem for the BJP chief ministers.

The Congress chief ministers have a relatively easier task: all they have to do is to criticise the central government for its blindness to India's safety.

But BJP CMs have to make threatening noises about Pakistan, as well as defend their PM. Not an easy task.

Take Kalyan Singh. When he goes to attend the cremations of brave soldiers, he thunders about how Paki-

HEARD IN SRINAGAR

The Pakistanis are hospitable people. So we're sending them to hospital

A SOLDIER'S COMMENT WHEN ASKED HOW THE KARGIL BATTLE WAS PROGRESSING

stan must be taught a lesson.

But it is difficult to shrug off that mood. At the recent chief ministers' conference in Delhi, Singh forgot that the PM's stand is that India will not cross the LoC. At the meeting, he called for retaliation against Pakistan. "*Kab tak lashe ginte rahenge* (How many dead bodies will it take for us to retaliate)?"

The PM is embarrassed by Singh's statement. How many more such statements will it take before Kalyan Singh is replaced?

right, here is news. We have an excellent intelligence-gathering system.

It may not have worked in Kargil, but it did in China! The taped conversations between the Pakistan Army chief, Parvez Musharraf, and his officers — four in all — recorded during Musharraf's visit to China at the height of the Kargil operation, were executed by the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) of the Government of India.

Contrary to general impression that the tapes were a gift to India from the United States, the recordings were actually done by Indian intelligence operatives. Two of the transcripts provide important insights into the

Coup in China

■ For the unbelievers and the cynics, who feel India can do nothing

CHECK-LIST

Thinking actresses: the new crop

■ **Kajol:** A good actress and a sensible girl. Enjoys reading, is ready to discuss classical music and has a view on society and politics.

■ **Pooja Bhatt:** Speaks on everything and has a great deal to say about everything, a suspicious personality trait at the best of times. But she's a competent actress and has just turned producer, proving she's no airhead.

■ **Manisha Koirala:** A lot was written in film magazines about her weakness for alcohol and her empty-headedness. But Koirala is not a bimbo. She comes from an intensely political background and speaks her mind.

■ **Tanvi:** The doe-eyed intelligent leading lady of the two latest Gujzar films, *Maachis* and *Hu Tu Tu*, can conduct an interesting conversation on any subject.

■ **Tara Deshpande:** Has just written a book and has acted in such intelligent movies as *Bombay Boys*. Just the littlest bit pretentious, something she will be cured of, the minute she comes into mainstream cinema.

uneasy relationship between the Pak Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, and the Pak Army.

The other two are in the government's possession but according to sources, "do not contain anything of consequence".

For 27 years, nothing happened in the Kargil area, leading to a combined army command-intelligence failure when Pakistan attacked. But medals must also be given to the R&AW personnel for their China coup.

Milky matter

■ Every time someone writes a profile on Rajesh Pilot, he never fails to remind the reader that he had started out life as a humble *gawala* (milkman). He has indeed come a long way from the days when he used to deliver milk on his cycle.

But recently, Pilot was seen perusing a copy of his bill from the Delhi Gymkhana Club. Before any questions could be asked, Pilot quickly said that he was looking at his bill for "milk products". He then shed light on an hitherto unknown facet of



Rajesh Pilot: more milk, please

Delhi's elite club: "You get the best milk products there."

Perhaps. But that does not quite explain Pilot's meeting with P.A. Sangma just a day before the rebel left the party. The two were seen lunching at the Gymkhana.

Now of course Pilot will tell us that Sangma went there for the milk products! •

Unanimous choice

■ As Kargil nearly reaches a solution, political parties are not looking beyond the war, to the election.

In Delhi, for the BJP, the biggest problem is what to

um



Kapil Dev: national MP?

do with the South Delhi seat. Earlier this seat was held by Sushma Swaraj. Now she has declared that she won't contest. From the BJP's point of view, this is a tough seat. So who will the party field from here?

One of the options being considered is cricketer Kapil Dev. He will be a sure-fire winner and the Congress can't seriously think of opposing him. Kapil has even won the RSS's approval by his statement that India should not play cricket with Pakistan after the way it has treated our jawans (see 'Profile'). They are working on him via Kirti Azad, Kapil's colleague and a party member.

But the Congress has approached Kapil as well. Now, it only remains for the Left parties to propose Dev's name and he can enter the

HEARD IN ISLAMABAD

Bill orders and bills obeys

ANGRY MUSLIM FUNDAMENTALISTS,
SHOUTING SLOGANS AT NAWAZ SHARIF'S
CAPITULATION TO US PRESIDENT BILL
CLINTON

In God's name

■ If you thought that Ram Jethmalani had served a stint as the minister of urban development, think again.

While serving his term at Nirmal Bhavan, Jethmalani laid the foundation stone for a temple at Noida, a Delhi suburb. Nothing wrong with that. Except that recently the same ministry had approved of a toll bridge to be built there — and the temple site happened to fall right in the middle of the proposed bridge.

Now the builders can't go ahead with their construction plans because the land is being claimed by the templewallahs, who even

Lok Sabha as a national MP.

CHECK-LIST

What to do with Kargil: the dilemma of political parties

■ **Kushabhau Thakre:** The BJP president wants to turn the war into the BJP's political plank. "We're going to play up all the good things this government has done," he says.

■ **Muslim Intellectuals:** Why are Muslims always being asked to prove their loyalty to India? We're totally with India. It is very wrong of Pakistan to talk in terms of 'jihad'. Islam is a very tolerant religion. Our soldiers are dying. It is India which has been aggressed against.

■ **RSS:** India must send jathas to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and settle this issue once for all. Our soldiers should not sacrifice their lives in vain.

■ **Congress:** We want the intelligence failure investigated. We want a Rajya Sabha session to discuss Kargil (see 'Mani-Talk').

■ **The Left:** While we support the government in the war, we cannot overlook the failure of intelligence.

have a stone bearing Jethmalani's name to prove their point.

So, if the people of Noida want their toll bridge, they better start praying. Because there seems to be nothing else they can do.

Owner's pride

■ If you're not invited to the next party Suresh Kalmadi hosts in his house, just curl up and die.

Kalmadi's house, on Delhi's Kamaraj Lane, behind the British high commissioner's residence, is a monument to innate good taste, something Congressmen are not generally known to have.

He has put in his own money to landscape the extensive gardens. He's put in a parquet floor and the back verandah has been given a log-hut effect, with hundreds of tiny lanterns hanging from the roof, which, when lit up, look stupendous. Everything is expensive but doesn't jar and is in keeping with the

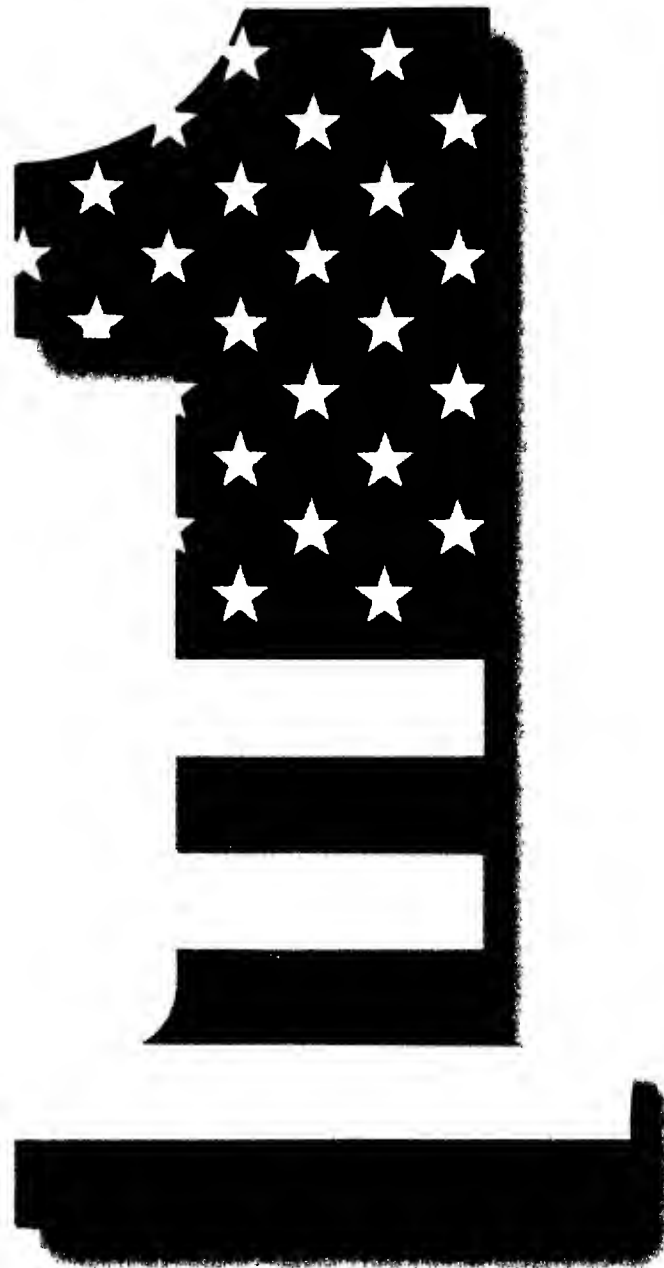


Suresh Kalmadi: good taste

grace of Lutyens' Delhi.

Most MPs treat their residences in Delhi as transit accommodation, both for themselves and their constituents. The contrast to Kalmadi's house is right there, a few houses away: defence minister George Fernandes' residence, which has no gates, an unkempt garden and is overflowing with dusty files, posters and papers.

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KARGIL: ALL THE QUESTIONS YOU WANTED ANSWERS TO

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coalition leader
to strong and
popular Prime
Minister: A.B.
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rides the
victory wave**

**Can this
man be
defeated?**



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In the Bard's own country

Dancers from Kerala take a Kathakali adaptation of *King Lear* to Shakespeare's Globe

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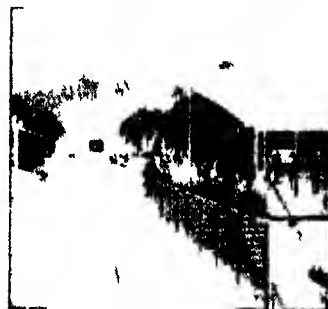
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COVER STORY 12

Can this man be defeated?

From shaky coalition leader to strong and popular Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee rides the victory wave



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Business with pleasure

The Sydney Olympics could be an excellent opportunity to boost Indo-Australian trade

TRAVEL 36

The river sutra

Cruising down the Ganga through six districts and eight centuries





Time to change

The cover story *Can they save Indian cricket?* (11—17 July) deserves praise for incisive analysis of the politics of captaincy. It's time the BCCI shunned politics to find a replacement for Azharuddin. The days of Azharuddin is over. He has done his bit and time has come to change the leadership.

Ajay Jadeja should be the right choice. He has proved his mettle when assigned with the job earlier. He is cool, confident and has the ability to motivate his teammates. Azharuddin had always been aloof, never communicated with his colleagues. But Jadeja always interacts with his colleagues. His poise and equanimity are what we need from a captain.
Ratan Chatterjee, Siliguri (West Bengal)

■ It's time the BCCI gives the mantle of captaincy to Sachin Tendulkar again. Sachin is a level-headed cricketer and has matured a lot since he was relieved of the captaincy. He has the talent to lead the team. He is capable of planning according to the strength of his team. Indian cricket team badly needs the genius Bombay bomber as the captain.
Namrata Khanna, New Delhi



**Ajay Jadeja:
should be the
right choice**

Futile endeavour

Iwould say replacing the name Calcutta with Kolkata wouldn't be a Holy Grail for Bengali culture (*Talk of the Town*, 20—26 June). The richness and heritage of a culture doesn't come by changing one name to another. A culture consists in the art, philosophy, science, and technology and development of the people. So what is necessary is transformation in the perception and attitude of the people.

Changing a name to another wouldn't bring about any change in such matters. It only leads to confusion and extravaganza. Weren't the names of Madras and Bombay changed into Chennai and Mumbai respectively and what glory it has brought in?

Carry on the crusade to reform the citizens and against all types of miscreants who are bent on tarnishing culture. And do not waste your energy on petty and trifle talks. Retain the name Calcutta as it is still beautiful.

Joby Mathew, Shillong (Meghalaya)

Unity in diversity

It is a spontaneous response of a nation to meet the challenges of evil designs of a treacherous neighbour (*People's war*, 4—10 July). It is real unity in diversity—the show of unity, strength and support to the *jawans*. It is the people and not any political party that could take credit for it. If political parties are patriotic, they shouldn't destroy it by bringing in casteist, communal, religious or regional sentiments. They should fight the election battle on the basis of

policies, programmes and plans.

A. Jacob Sahayam, Vellore (Tamil Nadu)

Irresponsible action

From the way Sonia Gandhi is behaving, it is clear that Congress leaders are lost at the quick turn of events and prospects of losing elections. The BJP-led coalition had performed well (*Sparring parties*, 4—10 July). Economy has registered an upswing. Inflation has been checked.

The BJP-led coalition wanted immediate election after the Lok Sabha was dissolved. Congress and the Leftists wanted the election around September. When Congress and Communists were clamouring for delayed elections, did they have the interest of the nation in mind? How can a caretaker government run a nation? Still, election commission sided with the Congress.

Now the effect of the bungling by Congress. Leftists and election commission is for all to see. Instead of standing by the BJP government, Sonia Gandhi and her party supported by the Leftists are singing different tunes. They indirectly aided Pakistan to confuse the national effort to repulse the Pakistani attack. Can there be more irresponsible action by those who want to rule India?

R.K. Mani, Mangalore (Karnataka)

Biased view

The columnist has raised a question over the purpose of Jaswant Singh presiding over the release of the tapes of conversation between senior armed forces personnel of Pakistan (*Who next for Prime Minister?* 4—10 July). Well, nothing

new for the columnist who cannot see any rationale with any act of the BJP government.

The columnist writes that the Congress having been in office for 45 of the last 52 years of Independence is the natural party of governance and the alliance led by the BJP, on the other hand, is an amalgam of those who have spent but seven of the last 52 years in government. This reminds me of the argument, which Kauravas gave before the war of Mahabharata, that the Pandavas have spent a large part of their life in *Banavaas*, Kauravas are the natural rulers of the kingdom. With this logic, there is no need for any elections and let the Congress be allowed to rule (or misrule) for eternity.

Satya Bhushan Verma, New Delhi

■ The columnist tries to advocate the merits of his party over the ruling coalition by claiming that the electorate is not overtly concerned about the capacity of the prime ministerial candidate to perform, but that of the leader to be able to successfully carry his team with him. The columnist must be aware that only a tried and tested politician (which Sonia Gandhi is not) can accomplish this task.

The columnist also contends that Sonia Gandhi has an iron grip on her party while Vajpayee couldn't coordinate his various allies to form a stable government. He should do well to remember that the current government would not have fallen, but for the machinations of the lady of 10 Janpath, who precipitated the political instability, and who is dependent on a coterie of failed politicians to maintain her iron grip on the party. Last but not the least, politicizing the Kargil war is in extremely bad taste. We can have post-mortem, but



Indian artillery firing at the enemy positions in Dras: sheer grit

only after the war is over. Doing otherwise is tantamount to mockery of the supreme sacrifice that our soldiers have rendered

Ambar Mallick, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Armchair analysis

While our soldiers battled in the highly inaccessible terrain under adverse weather conditions sacrificing their lives for our country, intense armchair analysis of the war continues unabated (*Living on the edge*, 13-19 June). While unanimity is being shown in supporting our soldiers, it's inexcusable that the government and the masses are turning a blind eye to the plight of the migrants from the war-

torn areas who are also casualties of the Kargil conflict.

SUNDAY deserves kudos for highlighting the plight of the migrants from Kargil, Dras, Pandraas, Matyan, Khurboo, Goshen and other villages affected by the war. Having lived for years with the dread of war hanging like the sword of Damocles over their heads, it's no wonder that they have reached the end of their tether.

It's surprising that the government is shirking its responsibility. It's a pity that these migrants are left to fend for themselves today. If it weren't for the magnanimity and love extended to them by the nearby villagers especially those from Zaskar valley, the plight of these hapless war victims leaves much to be desired. The

government's indifference to their woes shouldn't kindle the dormant insurgency in Kashmir again.

Nalini Sudhakaran, Trivandrum (Kerala)

Malicious account

The profile on P.A. Sangma (*Cheers*, 30 May-5 June) is reflective of the typical chauvinistic attitude of the so-called mainstream Indians towards the marginal identities which, as a matter of fact, justifies and explains the awareness of alienation among the people living in these regions of the country. To define P.A. Sangma in terms of some clichéd and stereotyped patterns is nothing but an extremely malicious attempt to denigrate the entire cultural identity of the ethnic people of the north-east.

It is absolutely opprobrious to describe the north-eastern people as incapable of intellectual activity and ignorant of social propriety. Above all, the write-up goes to the extent of ridiculing the look of Sangma for the reasons that his is not the kind of look that the cow-belt Indians would approve of.

I wonder as to how we should speak in English. Like Mamata Banerjee? Laloo Prasad? or like Deve Gowda?

Jyotirmoy Prodhan, Golakgang (Assam)

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

PRIZE RS 200 FOR CONTRIBUTORS



Mayuri Kango
Actress



Pallavi Joshi
Actress

Contributed by Sadhana Desgupta, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

APPOINTED: A.S. Dular as chief of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). He succeeds Arvind Dave who takes office as Governor of Arunachal Pradesh.

APPOINTED: Prof J.S. Rajput, as director of NCERT. He succeeds Prof A K Sharma.

DIED: Rajendra Kumar, 72, on 12 July, in Bombay. He was



popularly referred to as 'Jubilee King' for a string of hits in the 50s and 60s.

DIED: Janardhan Thakur, veteran journalist and political analyst, on 12 July, in Bombay. He was 64. He had authored several books including *All The Prime Minister's Men*

GRANTED: to Cromak Research Inc., in New Jersey, a patent for the use of *karela*, *jumun* and *brinjal* as anti-diabetic agents.

SELECTED: Bhachung Bhutia, to play some pre-season matches for England's first division club Fulham FC.

SIGHT & SOUND



■ The Mujahideen aim of capturing Kargil was to draw world attention to Kashmir, in which they have succeeded. Therefore, we appealed to them to give diplomacy a chance as the world focus is back on Kashmir.

NAWAZ SHARIF *Pakistan Prime Minister on the withdrawal of infiltrators from Kargil*

■ Vajpayee should talk less of the Lahore Declaration and spend more time ensuring the safety of the people in Jammu and Kashmir.

KAPIL SIBAL *AICC spokesman criticising the PM's rationale of providing safe passage to the Kargil intruders*

■ There is no secular communal divide now. The concept died the day Jyotiba Phule was certified secular and the DMK communal.

RAM VIJAY PASWAN *Janata Dal leader*



■ Kargil will have an impact on expenditure budget... But I am confident that during the current year it will be possible to manage excess expenditure without excessive impact on the economy.

YASHWANTH SINHA *finance minister*

■ We hope that these elections will bring political stability to India. Frequent change of government does affect foreign-investor confidence.

ROB YOUNG *British high commissioner to India*

■ I am an extremist. My love for my wife, my child and my films borders on the pathological.

SHAH RUKH KHAN *film star*

SEEN

NOTHING BUT CRICKET

Smart queries and smarter replies mark a panel discussion in Bombay



IT'S QUIZ TIME: Manjrekar, Dungarpur and Tendulkar at the chat show

There was master blaster Sachin Tendulkar. There was cricketer-turned-commentator Sanjay Manjrekar. And there was Raj Singh Dungarpur, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). All under one roof. The occasion was a panel discussion, *Beyond Cricket*, organised by the Rotary Club of Bombay. But the talk all through, revolved around the game, never going beyond it. Of course, the star of the show was the 'bonzer' lad from Bombay and most of the queries were directed at him.

Was he a demigod, somebody asked, wanting to rib him a bit. The genius was humility personified. 'I have not done one tenth of what our brave *jawans* are doing at the war-front.' The next one was a googly: was he under tremendous pressure to perform, simply to secure more juicy modelling contracts? Pat came the retort: 'I play cricket to my best ability. As long as I play well, I'll keep getting advertisement contracts.'

A loud inrump rippled through the audience, then a wry voice waited up from among the crowd: '*Bechara ek aadmi ko kitna kaam karna padta hai, nahin*'. The reference was to a TV commercial of a leading national daily which satirically takes off on the ace batsman. In the ad, a Sachin lookalike is shown scoring runs while simultaneously modelling for several products.

Sachin was also candid. He confessed that he had spent many a sleepless night before a match, one as recent as the Indo-Pak clash in the World Cup. 'I spent the

entire night planning my batting strategy for the next day,' he said. But ultimately, what happens on the field is quite different from what you anticipate. Even a minor thing like, say, moving a side screen can distract a pressurised batsman and affect his performance.'

Has there been any attitudinal difference to his game after his marriage? somebody else queried. Sachin, who had kept his affair secret from prying media eyes for a long time, replied: 'Well, there was never a pre-Anjali phase in my cricketing career. Both happened at rather the same time.'

Manjrekar was asked to narrate his funniest experience on the field. He recounted an incident involving Vinod Kambli. In a Ranji Trophy match between West Zone and South Zone, the flamboyant southpaw fielded a ball played by Azhar. But, after getting hold of it, he set about impressing the pretty young things seated a few metres behind with a few monkey tactics. The batsmen, meanwhile, ran live where none was due!

It was Dungarpur's turn next. Why not televise the much-maligned selection meetings, he was asked. It might stop speculation on selection procedures. It did n't rattle the suave BCCI chief. 'Well, we have seen live coverage of the Parliament,' he replied. 'So we wouldn't like to get into that.' In cricket, the selector's job, he added, was the third most difficult after umpiring and captaincy. 'Don't we know?'

Kanjal Walla/Bombay

"I play cricket to my best ability," said Sachin. "As long as I play well, I'll keep getting advertisement contracts"

Stomach cramps of a fourth-time candidate



It is now eight years since I first entered the electoral fray. I am about to face my fourth election in eight years. In the normal course, this should have happened in 2011. So, there was a day, not so long ago, when I thought the 13th Lok Sabha would be my valedictory Lok Sabha. But here I am in the running once again, praying that it will be at least 2004 before I start repairing my broken-down

jeep and shopping around for microphones and loud-speakers.

What have I learned of elections through one victory and two defeats? Lesson No. 1 is that candidates count for little. In a closely-fought contest, where the margin of difference is under 50,000, the reputation of the individual candidate might tilt the balance. But that personal standing comes into play only after the previous six lakh votes or more have been counted. The bulk of the electorate votes for the party or the symbol or the potential PM/CM. The candidate is regarded, quite rightly, as secondary.

Lesson No. 2 is that the candidate's campaign counts for little. It is the larger political battle that determines voters' choice. I have seen the same well-oiled DMK machine come a cropper in 1991 and 1998 as come out on top in 1996. The



Once more into the bre

money spent, the tempo of the campaign, the wooing of the voter, the tramping of the streets, the banners and hoardings and posters and wall-writings do not change much, the outcome does. Campaigning matters to the extent that it informs the electorate of the candidate being in the fray and extends the voter the courtesy of actually asking him or her personally for a vote, but, at the end of the day, it is the voter who makes up his own mind, and has probably done so before the campaign gets underway. Where I used to think it mattered how many searing hours I spent in my open jeep under the open sun, and how effective were my powers of persuasion at street-corner meetings, I am now getting increasingly convinced that all of this, while indubitably necessary, adds little to the pre-determined outcome. The campaign, then, is a kind of rite of passage. It is hardly decisive for the outcome.

LESSON NO. 3 IS that you never know what will happen. Every voter has long learned that the ballot is secret. So, every candidate is assured by every voter that the vote is for him and him alone. Whether you go into the poorest quarter of the villages — invariably the Dalit quarter — or into individual homes, or step into the neighbourhood store or collar in the street the proverbial man-in-the street, you are always assured that the vote is yours, man, not to worry, man. Then come the results. Of course, only one person wins. And the losers seek

what comfort they can in friends, supporters and anonymous well-wishers shaking their heads and muttering they just did not know how it happened. Twice thrashed at the polls, I am still to meet one constituent who confesses to having voted against me.

The fourth lesson is to implicitly believe — whatever the truth — that what you have been told is true and that you are going to win. For nothing is more exhausting, physically, intellectually or emotionally, than an election campaign. Superhuman calls are made on the candidate's physical, mental and emotional stamina. Thanks to Seshan, the trauma is now limited to a few weeks. And I could have kissed Gill — the fuzz notwithstanding — for fixing Day One as the election date for Mayiladuturai. This reduces the agony of the long-distance runner to a short if demanding sprint. My fantasy on the jeep is not the prettiest girl in the constituency but something called sleep which becomes a dim memory by the time the campaign comes to an end. My strongest electoral card is my cousin, a sturdy farmer who has all his life farmed the remains of what were once our lands. He is the best masseur in the world. And if it were not for his ministrations, my weary bones would call it all off by the first Wednesday of the second week. Therefore, unless the candidate is fuelled by the belief, however false, that all this will prove, in the end, worthwhile, it takes a fool to keep trying when all is lost.



The candidate's campaign counts for little. It is the larger political battle that determines voters' choice

up his otherwise fearfully dull life with a cine artiste or two. Perhaps I exaggerate because mine is a constituency which gets about as rural as one can get.

THE DAILY LIFE of the people, the well-off as much as the poor, is a life of such unrelieved monotony that an election campaign is like a festival. Anyone who thinks the electorate is sick of elections, I invite to Mayiladuturai. Far from being bored stiff with what is now becoming something of an annual charade, the voter thinks it quite a giggle. No standing in queues for tickets and no returning home to dull reality after a romp with the latest hit actress on the silver screen; the campaign is a continuous circus brought to town by the best in the business. Hence, the astonishing demand for a Rajesh Khanna or a Sunil Dutt, a Rajanikanth or a Juhi Chawla to win an election — film glamour plus a touch of social concern. And if a star is not available, the second best bet would be a top political leader, one of the big names that the people have heard about but not seen, so to speak, in the flesh. A poor second — but not altogether irrelevant.

Another thing to be warned against are pollsters. Not the big ones who predict everything for everywhere on every TV show and newspaper. (I recommend Arun Nehru: he has the uncanny knack of getting every constituency but mine right!) My word of caution is about those who come tapping at your door offering to check out your personal prospects in your very own constituency. For one thing, the questions they ask tend to alert the person being queried as to the candidate on whose behalf the poll is being taken. The interviewee then starts giving the answers that he thinks will please the interview-

ch, dear friends...

Next lesson. during a campaign, the voter is looking more for entertainment than enlightenment. So, bring on the glamour, especially if, like me, you lack it yourself. It is not that the voter does not take elections seriously. He does. And he has seriously made up his mind whom to vote for long before the circus starts. But as he already knows whom he is going to vote for, there is little you can tell him that he has not already made up his mind about. What you can do for him is brighten

wer. This, however, is a small snag. I am sure there are pollsters who have the professional ability to disguise their objective.

The problem is that even if the pollster is 100 per cent sterling right, what on earth are you supposed to do with his findings in the middle of a campaign? You can hardly switch constituencies, given that it is a miracle you have even got one ticket leave alone two. Second, the electorate has already made up its mind that it does not want you. So, all you can do is stand on the jeep and, in your mind, fudge the figures as best as you can to reassure yourself that, looked at in the right perspective, the poll results show you are actually going to win. Better far to give yourself over to an astrologer, who tells you what you want to hear. The results may belie his predictions — and usually do — but the prediction has served its therapeutic purpose of keeping up your morale.

My constituency contains the charming little temple town of Vaideeswarankovil, perhaps Tamil Nadu's most well-known centre of reading the palmyra leaves. I have it thus far to my credit that I am the only MP the constituency has ever had who has never tried to get his fortune told by a soothsayer. I think I am going to blot my copy book this time round. Might as well get my psycho shot from a magic-man than a pollster. Besides, the leaves may prove more accurate than the polls. Ask N. Ram of *The Hindu*. •



T.N. Seshan: superhuman calls are made on the candidate's physical, mental and emotional stamina during campaigning; thanks to Seshan, the trauma is now limited to a few weeks

Code of conduct

The EC should be more practical in implementing the guidelines



The Election Commission has announced the dates to elect a new Parliament. With the announcement of poll dates, the model code of conduct comes into force. It has been

noticed that the EC is yet to get over the hangover of T.N. Seshan. This time the election process will continue for three months and it looks that if the code of conduct is implemented the way it was during Seshan's time, no work will take place in the government and the nation as well as society will be the worst sufferers.

Seshan not only implemented the code of conduct in his own style but he virtually intervened in each and every affair like a dictator. The state governments found it difficult to function as

T.N. Seshan: ruled like a dictator



even routine decisions were being subjected to scrutiny. No development work can take place during the election process is rubbish, irrational and unreasonable.

The code of conduct should be implemented, but the EC must analyse the reason and rationale before taking any decision. Decisions relating to development are not being taken as ministers and bureaucrats are both scared of the EC. If the process of development in every state is halted for three months it cannot be recovered again.

It is accepted that officials involved in the election process should not be transferred. Officials in the district administration and the police are by and large involved in the election process and they should not be transferred. But officers in other departments including secretaries, joint secretaries and additional secretaries can always be transferred. And officials in departments like education, cultu-

re, fisheries, health, science and technology etc. are also not transferred for fear of violating the code of conduct though they don't have anything to do with elections.

Similarly, at Doordarshan, the EC's ghost haunts everybody's mind. A lot of funny decisions are being taken. Now, for three months no politicians can be interviewed nor his face shown in any way. If he wants to sing a *filmi* number on television, his face will be banned. Also, politicians' names cannot be taken in any programme. Interestingly, DD Chennai stopped screening the popular Tamil film song, *Sonia! Sonia!*

A Colgate toothpaste commercial was banned because it shows rising sun which happens to be the symbol of some political party. All the election symbols figuring in various advertisements like elephants, arrow, wheel, bullock cart, cycle, tree, lotus, etc. have been banned. If a character in a serial has a name same as that of a politician, it is being deleted.

Like in the US, Doordarshan should be used for election campaigns. It will help in cutting the cost of electioneering. If a political party wants to reach the remotest village, it can reach through Doordarshan than by jeep or motorcycle. DD can have a system of charging fees for the campaign and can limit the timing as per the strength of the political party. Then, no party can garner maximum time using money power.

The EC should forcefully impose a code on the district administrations, chief ministers, ministers and Prime Ministers who announce populist measures during elections. If a chief minister announces bonanza for his voters on the eve of the election, it is wrong. There the EC should be strict. For instance, the EC was right in restraining Chandrababu Naidu when he announced populist schemes to lure voters after dates for the Assembly election were declared.

The EC should also take a second look on a candidate's expenditure. There are several unreasonable provisions in this, too, which are impractical as most of the affidavits filed by a candidate is nowhere near the truth. •

Handle with care

The commission of inquiry probing Kargil will have its task cut out



At the time of writing details are lacking, but it is clear that the Vajpayee government has decided to appoint a commission of inquiry into the manifest failure of intelligence because of which, in relation to Kargil, this country was taken by the kind of surprise that has been rare in the history of warfare since Pearl Harbour. For the benefit of

younger readers who may not have heard of Pearl Harbour, let me add that this was the spot where, during the Second World War, Japan had sunk nearly the entire US Pacific Fleet even though the two countries, like India and Pakistan at present, were supposed to be at peace with each other.

The first thing to be said about this decision is that it underlines painfully how ill-advised the Prime Minister was in declaring at one stage that there had been "no failure of intelligence in Kargil because nothing had happened in that sector for 22 years". He had the good sense and grace to correct himself later when he stated that the paramount lesson of Kargil was the need for "eternal vigilance". However, it is shocking beyond words that the defence minister, George Fernandes, should go on denying failure of intelligence even after the decision to set up the inquiry commission and to punish some of the erring officers of the external intelligence agency, universally known by its delightfully appropriate acronym, RAW.

Vastly more important than this is another rude reality of life. The establishment of the inquiry commission or committee will be utterly meaningless, and would create more problems than it might solve, if the approach to its work is going to be the same as successive governments have adopted in relation to the Henderson-Brooks report on the military disaster during the 1962 border war with China.

The terms of reference of that inquiry committee were not as wide as they were disingenuously made out to be. What is more, its four-volume report (weighing six kilos, according to the late General J.N. Chaudhuri) remains 'top secret' to this day, a good 36 years after it was submitted. The crowning irony is that some foreigners have copies of this report, and Neville Maxwell, the notorious Indophobe and Sinophile, has made selective use of it to traduce India and suck up to his Chinese friends.

With the composition of the inquiry committee—it included then brigadier, later Lt-General Prem Bhagat, a Victoria Cross winner—no one had any problem. In today's circumstances, the BJP-led government will have to see to it that the composition and terms of reference of the committee command the country's confidence, and that there is a prior commitment that the report, to be submitted quickly enough, will be published immediately.

It may well be that some highly sensitive information included in the inquiry report may have to be withheld from the public and even Parliament. In order to do so, however, the relevant portions of the report should be confidentially shared with the leader of the Opposition and heads of other major parties in the Lok Sabha.

Sadly, all this is easier said than done. Both the government and the principal Opposition are so crassly preoccupied with electoral advantage that national interest takes a back seat. One expects better from the leaders of the world's largest democracy, but when electoral exigencies beckon everything can go wrong. Even if the leaders can be persuaded to behave responsibly, not many of them have even the haziest notion of matters military and strategic. I know of no other country where such a depressing state of affairs prevails.

To cap it all, there is every danger that even those chosen as members of the proposed inquiry commission or committee



George Fernandes: has been denying failure on the part of intelligence agencies

will first need to educate themselves before they can ask questions and probe what went wrong.

Moreover, and this is crucial, another problem, not usually aired in public, has got to be faced squarely. Even during the fierce fighting in Kargil, the armed forces had reasons to be unhappy with the way politicians on both sides of the fence were handling the Kargil issue as an instrument of scoring debating points against each other. At times the performance of those in power was more annoying than that of the Congress or the Left parties. For, the leaders of the ruling coalition wallowed in speaking in different voices, often contradicting one another.

Now there is a clear danger that in the forthcoming battle of the ballot, the Kargil affair and the inquiry into it might become a political football. It would be a grim tragedy if the armed forces get caught in the crossfire of political warfare. This has to be avoided at all costs.

It will also help if, after being appointed, the inquiry body takes about a fortnight to educate itself and gives the same time to all the relevant institutions—the Army, the Air Force, the RAW, the Intelligence Bureau and even the BSF (which apparently had some information about what was afoot but failed to communicate it to the right quarters)—to hold in-house inquiries of their own and be ready to face all questions without trying to be evasive. •

Can this man be defeated?

From shaky coalition leader to strong and popular Prime Minister: Vajpayee rides the victory wave

*Sharif sharif na raha;
Atal atal raha*

— graffiti in south Delhi.

If the Kargil war hadn't happened, no one would have believed that Atal Behari Vajpayee was a stubborn man. If there is one thing that has set him apart from other Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders, it is the absence of dogmatism. He has been tolerant, in the BJP's eyes, to the point of amorality, he's treated the hide-bound in his party with contempt and disdain, and has quite cheerfully ploughed a lonely furrow in a party that considers non-conformity a treasonous offence.

And yet, throughout the Kargil war, the Prime Minister was unmoved by appeals from his party that India cross the Line of Control (LoC). No amount of shrill rhetoric, angry warnings and dire election predictions could make him change his mind. "Right in the beginning, Atalji took the decision that unless defeat was staring us in the face, we would not cross the LoC," said Brajesh Mishra, principal secretary to the Prime Minister. "He never wavered from this decision."

Others may have wilted under all the pressure. Not Vajpayee. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) was besieged by calls from the BJP asking what the hell the government was doing — was India destined forever to be a passive, hapless nation, turning the other cheek? *Panchajanya*, the organ of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), wrote editorial after editorial offering the PM all moral and material support if he should turn aggressive. "Why did we ever make the bomb? Was it to swaddle it in cloth and lock it up in the Godrej almirah?" asked an angry RSS sympathiser.

This was not the only pressure. Somewhere along the way, there was a genuine



The Kargil war was won by the Indian *jawan* and Atal Behari Vajpayee. What do they have in common? Both are soldiers, seeking peace and tranquillity



THE THREE MEN WHO HANDLED THE PARTY

• **A.B. Vajpayee:** Cool and unemotional, he appealed to the world to see things from India's point of view.

• **Jaswant Singh:** Was responsible for executing much of what the PM carried out as spadework.

• **Sanjiv Mishra:** Was the PM's emissary on several occasions and explained to the world that India did not have infinite resources and patience.

THE THREE MEN WHO HANDLED THE PARTY

• **L.K. Advani:** Held everyone at bay — the lunatic fringe, the Ma-Too-Hindus, the politically-ambitious party hawks. Provided total and unflagging support to the PM.

• **A.B. Vajpayee:** Paid no attention to repeated demands that the BJP fulfil its mandate of reclaiming POK. Refused to be swayed by managers who argued that Kargil could be served up as an Election Special to an electorate with jaded palates.

• **Sanjiv Mishra:** Handled calls from 11 Ashok Road admirers. Suggested ways in which the BJP's



A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani jingoism could be turned to India's advantage vis-a-vis the rest of the world, while keeping it muted domestically.

THE THREE MEN WHO HANDLED THE WAR

• **George Fernandez:** Obviously, as defence minister, he had everything to do with the war. But he handled the fallout carefully, keeping the morale of the soldiers up without resorting to anti-Pakistan propaganda.

• **A.B. Vajpayee:** Never, never interfered in the pace of the war. The army and air force are full of praise for the man because he never imposed deadlines and always provided whatever they asked for.

• **Sanjiv Mishra:** Acted as a nodal liaison man for interaction between the top leadership and the defence forces. Facilitated meetings. It helped that he knew



George Fernandez



Jaswant Singh
the PM's mind thoroughly.

THE THREE MEN WHO HANDLED POLITICS

• **A.B. Vajpayee:** Played by the rules of consensus — took the Opposition into confidence about everything but refused to be bullied into calling a Rajya Sabha session, because he knew the Opposition wanted to pass a resolution against the government which is in a minority.

• **L.K. Advani:** Deflected all criticism of his ministry on account



P. V. Narasimha Rao
of intelligence failure by just keeping quiet and not giving anyone any issues to raise.

• **P. V. Narasimha Rao:** Sensed that the Opposition could use the media and tried to deflect attention through informal briefings.



Brajesh Mishra: "Right in the beginning, Atalji took the decision that unless defeat was staring us in the face, we would not cross the LoC. He never wavered from this decision"

apprehension that India may not be able to win the war unless the army was allowed to cross the LoC. Before the decisive battle for Tololing, the mood was black. Indians were losing men without anything substantial to show for it. "We were haemorrhaging, we knew it, and it was hard to keep one's cool," says an official in the PMO.

But Atal Behari Vajpayee, say his friends, never lost his cool. "Atalji is *sthirapragna* (the serene one). He is unmoved by joy, stoic about sorrow. Advaniji is the emotional one. Atalji takes things as they come," says a member of the national executive of the BJP. Even the lure of making Indian nationalism a huge election issue was ignored by the PM.

Instead, he stood firm and stubborn in his belief that Pakistan would be driven back by the Indian Army. And when it was, he refused to crow about it. Because he knew all the time that this is what would happen.

It is Vajpayee's calm and unemotional handling of the war which has prevented other — especially communal — conflagrations in India. Once again, he has proved that he's the right man in the wrong party, and thankfully for India, at the right time.

In keeping with the BJP's fondness for alliterative slogans, the first draft of the PM's address to the nation said the key to winning the war was: reasonable behaviour, restraint, and resolute steadfastness. So how did these three 'R's work out?

Restraint was evident right from the beginning. Even when the question of air strikes against the intruders' camps on the LoC was considered, the PM thought long and hard about it. "Each step was deliberate. That one, most deliberate of all," says Mishra, recalling the agony of deciding whether the Indian Air Force (IAF) could be used in an air campaign east to west, when the whole intrusion issue could be settled in a few hours, if the IAF was permitted to go north to south, i.e. beyond the LoC and back.

This proposal was, of course, rejected out of hand. But even the decision to use air power, which the Pakistani side used to great advantage to show that they were aggressed against, not the aggressors, took several days to come. This in turn threw the army in a tizzy because in their view at the time, the IAF intervened too late. In fact, there was considerable pressure from the army on the government to induct the IAF in the

battle.

Later, when the air strikes were moderated and withdrawn, the army chief was to thank the PMO for thinking through the decision because the speed of the IAF and the army action was not matching — the IAF was moving too fast for the army.

While the operations were on, there was absolutely no interference from the government in trying to force the pace of the action. "Men were coming back in coffins. All we could hear was the wailing of their families," said an army officer. But the PM only advocated restraint.

And when India got its territory back? The Prime Minister was happy, but cautioned against crowing about the victory. The fear was that too much celebration in India might strengthen the fundamentalists in that country. And in Vajpayee's view, the worst thing that could happen to Pakistan — and India — is that Nawaz Sharif might be overthrown. With a fragmented and weak Opposition, the fundamentalists could seize power, leading to a situation much worse than what it is today.



Vajpayee with Nawaz Sharif

Few people know all that India did to help and stabilise Nawaz Sharif — within reason. The taped conversation of Pakistan Army chief Parvez Musharraf and his chief of staff, Mohammed

Aziz, recorded during the former's trip to Beijing, was given to Nawaz Sharif before it was made public in India. This was so that Sharif knew what was going to hit him. (Those who were on the spot

CIVIL LIST ■ What the politicians were doing when the soldiers were fighting

BASU, JYOTI: Snuck to the predictable line of opposition and demanded a Rajya Sabha session. But after that he deviated from script and praised the government for its handling of the crisis in Kargil. In not resorting to scoring cheap political points, Basu showed that he was not just a politician. He could also be a statesman.

FERNANDES, GEORGE: The defence minister is the only man in government who's lost the media war. First, there was a quibble over whether he promised the infiltrators a 'safe passage' or not. Fernandes said he'd been misquoted, and kept a low profile thereafter.

GANDHI, SONIA: She was torn between playing the role of a responsible opposition and her natural inclination to attack the BJP for its intelligence failure



Jyoti Basu

which caused the crisis in the first place. But the Congress president made a poor compromise by praising the *jawans* on the one hand and threatening to raise certain questions at an appropriate time on the other.

GUJRAL, INDER KUMAR: The former Prime Minister decided to see if he could get his old job back — either as foreign minister or

Prime Minister, it didn't really matter which one. He was just desperate to be back in the limelight again.

GOWDA, H.D. DEVE: Saw in the war a chance to add to his newspaper clippings file. He made two demands that he apparently thought would boost the morale of the soldiers: that George Fernandes should be sacked; and that the government should agree to a Rajya Sabha session. That was the sum total of his contribution to the Kargil situation. After which he dozed back into oblivion, only to wake up and find that his party had split, leaving him behind.

JAYALALITHA, JAYARAM: Played the same role as she did when she was in the government — attacked the ruling coalition. But she also took time off from demanding a Rajya Sabha session, and left Manmohan Singh and A.K.

say it took nearly 15 minutes for Nawaz Sharif to recover from the information that his army had attacked India and he was the last to know.)

Restraint was also evident from the way India tackled the war internationally. There were no impassioned speeches,

The "personal interest" that Clinton claims to take in Indo-Pak relations is in the resumption of the Lahore process, not in the resolution of the Kashmir issue. The US has told India that it is anxious that India and Pakistan take the 'dialogue' route to resolve their differences



Bill Clinton

ches, no exhortations to the United Nations. India went about its work quietly, pausing only to inform the world in a level voice how Pakistan had betrayed peace in the subcontinent.

This was once again Vajpayee's personality asserting itself in the leadership of India. Brajesh Mishra carried a letter from the Indian Prime Minister to President Bill Clinton. He met state department officials in Geneva, including US defence honcho Sandy Berger. Vajpayee's letter was straightforward. He said India was observing restraint and that it was sorry the spirit of the Lahore Declaration had been betrayed. A one-paragraph sentence followed: "We will get rid of them, one way or another," the sentence said.

The Americans seized upon this sentence as evidence that India could consider crossing the LoC if pushed. Then followed the famous 4 July meeting between Nawaz Sharif and Bill Clinton.

There is a great deal of speculation in India as to the role of the United States in the war, much of it stemming from Nawaz Sharif's claim that Kashmir had been internationalised because of the accord between the US and Pakistan that President Clinton would take "a personal interest" in the resolution of the Kashmir issue.

Antony to hammer a deal with the Congress for the next elections.

MAHAJAN, PRAMOD: While the Pakistan information minister has to explain why Pakistan lost out on media coverage, Mahajan was quick to declare that India had won the media war. And the I&B minister did his bit: for once, Doordarshan News gave priority not to Mahajan and his antics, but to the soldiers on the front. And if



Pramod Mahajan

he banned Pak TV, then he provided a substitute — by inaugurating the Dogri channel in Srinagar right in the middle of the conflict.

MISHRA, BRAJESH: Won the media war for the government since he was the most articulate and rational voice on television. In fact, when compared to Natwar Singh's hysteria, George Fernandes' faux pas and Jaswant Singh's slow and deliberate statements, Mishra quickly emerged as the voice of reason.

NATH, KAMAL: Took the official Congress delegation to Kargil in his helicopter. First, of course, he cracked jokes about the delegation list actually being a hit-list. But while he was there, he asked many questions and generously shared his Iridium phone with those who wanted to make a call back home. He also managed to take some



I.K. Gujral

aerial photographs of the Line of Control — so now he can give an informed briefing on the conflict, along with pictures to illustrate his point. Looks like Natwar Singh has competition.

PAWAR, SHARAD: He wasn't very happy with the timing of the conflict — it coincided with the formation of his new party and

(Continued on page 18)



During the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, the RSS sought frequent consultations but Vajpayee avoided them, leading to the emergence of L.K. Advani as the supreme leader of the BJP

The fact is that the "personal interest" Clinton claims to take is in the resumption of the Lahore process, not in the resolution of the Kashmir issue. The US has told India that it is anxious that India and Pakistan take the 'dialogue' route to resolve their differences, not the barrel-of-the-gun route.

What made all the difference to the world was the Lahore bus trip. India established its credentials as a country which wants peace, even after becoming a nuclear power, by taking the Lahore initiative. This move, coupled with restraint on the Kargil war, sent the PM's stock in the world sky-high. Informally, several US officials told the PMO that if "we'd been in your place, we would not have been able to show as much restraint".

It is not hard to see why. No other Prime Minister of India has gone to Pakistan and embraced the Pak PM so readily. Certainly no Indian PM has visited the Minar-e-Pakistan, the site which actually celebrates the Partition of India and the creation of Pakistan. The emotional appeal of the gestures was lost on no

CIVIL LIST ■ What the politicians were doing when the soldiers were fighting

took away media attention. But later, he used the all-party meetings as a chance to emerge as a national leader. While Sonia stayed away from the first two, Pawar attended all the briefings, and even gave soundbites on the situation.

SINGH, ANUR: Took the Congress by surprise by suddenly emerging from hibernation and taking up office at South Block. During the conflict, he wrote to the external affairs minister, offering his services. For his defence expertise — and also for reasons political — the ministry gave him a desk at South Block. However, with the war at an end, one is not quite sure what Singh will do in his new office.

SINGH, JASWANT: Addressed two press briefings at slow speed. One was about his visit to China, but he was gracious enough to include



Sharad Pawar

Kargil in the itinerary as well. Singh also went to China where his visit was far more successful than Nawaz Sharif's. And now he's off to meet US secretary of state Madeleine Albright to assure her that America did the right thing in supporting India. That must make a pleasant change from his visits to Madras to meet Jayalalitha.

SINGH, KALYAN: Agreed with the BJP in refusing a Rajya Sabha

session. But that is how far he was prepared to toe the party line. According to him, the infiltrators should have been driven away instead of being allowed to leave. This comes dangerously close to the Congress criticism of the government for allowing the infiltrators a safe passage out of India. But then, at the best of times, the chief minister of UP never knows which side he's on — or, more to the point, who's on his side.

SINGH, NATWAR: A walking-talking disaster, and the Congress decides to appoint him spokesperson for the party during the Kargil crisis. Singh's pontifications did no service to the Congress during the daily briefings. For instance, when he was asked to comment to a news channel straight off the ticker, he instead bemoaned an age of instant soundbites which left no time for analysis. Which is all very well —

one, and Western nations were able to say with relief that at last the two most troublesome nations in the world had sorted out their problems because the bigger among them had taken the initiative.

Then Pakistan blew it.

The mature and responsible handling of the Kargil problem won India many friends. Coupled with the domestic handling of the situation and cool thinking, the PM was able to convince even the hardcore in his party, the RSS, that his way of tackling issues was the right one.

This is nothing new for Vajpayee. He's had to tackle the RSS many times in the past. In the mid-1980s, when the BJP was under pressure to join the Ayodhya movement, Vajpayee initiated a debate in the *sangh*, popularly known as 'Ram vs Roti'. While Ashok Singhal of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) argued that it was important to release the Hindu 'mamas' from its shackles by ensuring the places of worship of the Hindus were 'liberated' Vaj-



With the Lahore bus trip, India established its credentials as a country which wants peace, even after becoming a nuclear power. This move, coupled with restraint on the Kargil war, has sent Vajpayee's stock in the world sky-high

but what about the official Congress reaction?

SCINDIA, VASUNDHARA RAJE:

The minister of state for external affairs was missing from the action. Except for one fax to newspaper offices which said that the minister would receive donations for Kargil in her office. And could a photographer cover the event?



Jayalalitha

SURJEET, HARKISHEN SINGH: As expected, the CPM leader has been critical of the government. He has not only castigated the government for the intelligence failure, but also for its diplomatic failure. According to him, the mishandling of the Kargil situation has given the Americans a chance to interfere in Kashmir.

THACKERAY, BAL: Nodded with quiet approval when Kapil Dev said he wouldn't play any more matches with the Pakis. Followed this up with the demand that Dilip Kumar should return the *Nishan-e-Imtiaz* to Pakistan. In other words: the Shiv Sena is *kutti* with Pakistan.

THAKRE, KUSHABHAU: Was as clueless as ever. Said the party should make Kargil an election issue and was contradicted by the PM. Said the elections would have to be put off because of Kargil and



Bal Thackeray

was contradicted by the Election Commission. Need we say more?

VAJPAYEE, ATAL BEHARI: Beat Pramod Mahajan's track record as the most efficient fund-raiser from the BJP, both in cash and Cielos. Vajpayee was on a collection spree for the nation, rather than the party, so Mahajan's job is secure.

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi



J.H. Patel

States of Uncertainty

Where the BJP could trip up in the next elections

• **Karnataka:** With J.H. Patel joining the BJP alliance, the BJP has nothing left to criticise at the state level. They are now the laughing stock of the Opposition, and angry that Patel has robbed them of an election plank.

• **Uttar Pradesh:** The movement from the BJP to the Congress has suddenly and mysteriously become a flood. Two ministers in the Kalyan Singh government have joined the Congress and the latest to cross sides is Ashok Singh, a relative of Sanjay Singh and the MP who represented Rai Bareilly in the last election. This could mean that the going will be tough for the BJP.

• **Delhi:** Though it is a small state, the election here will be closely fought because there is a lot of questioning on Kargil and on the



Kalyan Singh

BJP's administrative performance. Could be unpredictable.

• **Madhya Pradesh:** There is impact of Kargil in MP. And while there is a chance that the state government's incumbency could go against the Congress, the BJP has done nothing to provide the state a political issue for the elections.

payee argued, in the fashion of the liberation theologians, that the BJP must adopt a more progressive line on the issue of religion, embracing its socio-economic aspect.

This created so much heat and light that a senior *sangh* member, Govindacharya, even went on record to tell a weekly magazine at the time that Vajpayee's statements were acts of indiscipline and demanded an enquiry against him.

At about the same time, a leader from the Hindutva movement — and there were many at the time — remarked in another interview that in the "Fifties and Sixties, you would be hard put to find Vajpayee in the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) office. His favourite haunts used to be the Communist Party office and he enjoyed the company of comrades!"

These interviews and remarks of that era show what an uphill task Vajpayee has had to fight for space as a moderate in a party which is, only now, coming to be seen as moderate.

This struggle in the Hindu mainstream party goes back to 1965, the only time the RSS was seriously angered at Vajpayee's independent thinking. At the Vijayawada session of the BJS, the RSS decided to change the leadership of the Jana Sangh. In the past, presidents of the Jana Sangh had always been popular public figures, members, but not cadres of the *sangh*, like Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, Maulichandra Sharma, Di Dharmaveera and Premnath Dogra.

However, it was decided in 1965 that the president of the Jana Sangh would be a younger man from the RSS, Bachchraj Vyas. This was not a decision welcomed among the younger elements in the BJS, at that time Balraj Madhok and Atal Behari Vajpayee. Both boycotted the session, seriously angering the RSS.

Later, while Madhok was thrown out of the *sangh*, Vajpayee reconciled himself to the *sangh*'s decision.

The second time he took on the *sangh* publicly was on an issue once again raised by Govindacharya. Party general secretary at the time, Govindacharya's dismissive remark that the party was quite different from the likes of Vajpayee who was just a '*mukhauta*' (mask) of the party, was taken up by Vajpayee seriously. As the remarks were reported by party journal *Panchajanya*, Vajpayee cross-checked with the author of the article in which they were quoted, and then lashed out at the 'hardliners' who prided themselves on their line.

The occasion he chose was the release of a biography of Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia by party leader Mridula Sinha. When he was asked to release the book, he remarked that he couldn't understand why he was invited to such important functions because people in the party only considered him a '*mukhauta*'. His anger was so palpable that the RSS was furious with Govindacharya. On this occasion, he had the full and unqualified support of the *sangh*.

Since then, his relationship with the *sangh* has been rocky. While initially the *sangh* was upset that Jaswant Singh, not one of their favourite sons, was appointed in the government as foreign minister, that has now passed.

What has changed? Merely that the *sangh* now has been able to accept Vajpayee's way of respecting and spreading Hinduism: the incremental growth and spread of ideology. It was this approach which led Sadhvi Rithambhara to denounce Vajpayee as "half-a-Congressman". But there is clear evidence, judging by the applause Vajpayee has got on his handling of the Kargil issue, that the RSS is keen to adopt and protect him.

This is not the first time Vajpayee has been summoned back to the fold. In 1987, when the RSS had a huge convention in Nagpur and older RSS workers were also invited, Vajpayee also participated and his approach of winning the world won wide applause. During the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, the RSS sought frequent consultations but Vajpayee avoided them, leading to the emergence of L.K. Advani as the supreme leader of the party. Vajpayee was largely marginalised.

Gradually, beginning with his second term as PM, Vajpayee has made his peace with the RSS. He now *talks* to the *sangh* leadership. (Professor Rajendra Singh [Rajju Bhaiyya] says Vajpayee must be the son of Goddess Saraswati, he has so much power in his voice). Take the recent release of the stamp of the RSS founder Dr Hedgewar. Not only did Vajpayee agree to the stamp, he was also present at the function for its release.

The thing about Vajpayee is, he knows the psychology of the ordinary *sangh* workers and their training in the *shakhas*. So he uses metaphors and words and phrases which fulfil a dual purpose — while this puts across in moderation to the non-BJP forces what the RSS is saying, it conveys the associa-



The PM with Army Chief Gen. V.P. Malik at South Block

Vajpayee's calm and unemotional handling of the war has prevented other conflagrations in India. Once again, he has proved that he is the right man, in the wrong party, at the right time

tion between his ideas and the *sangh*.

Take the attack on the Christians. During a visit to riot-hit areas in Gujarat, Vajpayee remarked cautiously on the need for a debate on conversion. Uncaring of the criticism of the secularists, he agreed with the RSS that Dalits and tribals should not be allowed to be converted by mercenaries. This helped in keeping a dialogue open between the secularists and the RSS.

The important thing about Vajpayee is his capacity to be a bridge between issues of rationalism in politics and issues of spiritualism. That is as it should be. Why should spiritualism con-

tinue to be denied? Why should religious moderation be an anathema in modern India?

The *sangh* led by Atal Behari Vajpayee is a benign Hindu entity. The danger is that unless they are given something to do, the Hindu extremists might try to stage a resurgence. What India will do then is hard to predict.

The Kargil war was won by the Indian *jawans* and Atal Behari Vajpayee. What do they have in common? Both are soldiers, seeking peace and tranquillity. •

Aditi Phadnis with Rajni Srinivasan/New Delhi

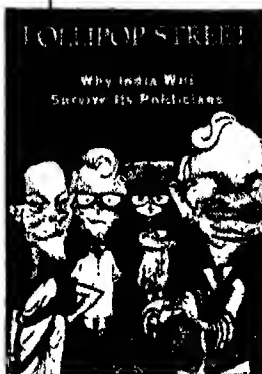
During a tete-a-tete with the Prime Minister, Tavleen Singh finds he has lost his magic touch

Lollipop Street is Tavleen Singh's metaphor for all the things that are wrong with India. Huge concrete lollipop-shaped structures, meant for hoardings, all along a street in Bombay where only the very rich or the very poor live, neither of whom have any use for the hoardings... She says Lollipop Street is a symbol for India, with its unthinking policies and its unconcerned politicians.

Her book, a collection of profiles of politicians whom she interviewed for her hugely successful television serial Ek Din Ek Jeevan, is called Lollipop Street for this reason. Singh looks at India and its public figures with the eyes of a critical observer, looking at a picture that has, somehow, gone askew.

She is uniquely placed to do this. One of SUNDAY's founder-reporters, over the last 25 years Singh has built up a formidable reputation for demolition-jobs on the rich and famous. She is one of India's best known columnists today.

In this extract, in her profile on Atal Behari Vajpayee, Singh contrasts the Vajpayee of 1977, the charismatic speaker, with the weary Prime Minister of today. She captures the mood of the Emergency as evocatively as the dreariness of Vajpayee's tenure as Prime Minister and asks how a man who can be such an inspiring speaker, could prove to be such a lacklustre Prime Minister. But, she says, at least he tried



Senior journalists stayed away because most of them were convinced that there was not the flimsiest chance of Mrs Gandhi losing the election. They went by logic. Why would a woman who was a dictator bother to announce a general election if there was any chance of her losing? We went by instinct and instinct told us that people were angry enough over the various manifestations of their loss of freedom to vote against her. This loss crippled most of all the poorest, the

most helpless of India's citizens. They were the ones who found themselves unable to acquire rickshaw licences until they could produce a certificate declaring themselves sterilised. They were the ones, again, who were thrown out of slums in the inner city to distant wastelands on the other side of the river Yamuna because Sanjay Gandhi thought that Delhi needed to be cleaned up. It was also their relatives, in villages in north India, who told them about teams of officials who had turned up and ordered people to get sterilised. Inevitably, they were the ones who turned up in large numbers to listen to the Janata Party leaders that January evening.

But as the leaders began to speak, a kind of disappointment seemed to settle over the crowd. The leaders were mostly old men who spoke in a far too literary Hindi about things that most in the audience did not fully understand. They spoke of fundamental rights and their loss, of dictatorship and its meaning, of jail and how they had managed to survive, but the crowd remained largely unmoved. People stayed, nevertheless, and a colleague who was better informed than I was, told

THE HA



A.B. VAJPAYEE

me that they were staying because they wanted to hear Vajpayee. "This is mainly a Jana Sangh (later BJP) crowd," he said, "so they'll wait till Vajpayee speaks."

He spoke last. It was well past 9 pm by then. Dark, foggy and bitterly cold. When Vajpayee stood up and walked to the microphone, the crowd responded with a round of polite applause, louder than it had been for the other speakers, but not madly enthusiastic. Then, he started to speak. And the crowd went wild.

He began with a verse which he later said he composed while waiting to make his speech. *Baad muddat key miley*

LO SLIPS



hain deewane. It has been an age since we lovers (of freedom) met. Kehney, sunney ko bahut hain afsaney. There are many stories to tell, many to hear. Khuli hawa mein zara saans to leylein, kab tak rahegi azadi kaun jaaney. But, let us breathe deeply first of the air of freedom, for who knows how long it will remain.

Simple poetry though it may have been, it must count as one of the most politically inspiring pieces of poetry he has written because it captured exactly what the crowd was feeling. They had come that evening, as we ourselves had, fearing some kind of punishment. Nobody believed that the Emer-



Vajpayee agreed that the BJP state governments had not performed much better than the Congress had, but this was because a change was needed at the Centre. Not a good answer from a man who hoped to soon lead a BJP government in Delhi

gency had been lifted for good or that Mrs Gandhi would allow herself to be defeated. Everyone was convinced that if she saw herself losing the election she would reimpose the Emergency overnight, just as she had done before. It was this fear, as well as the exultation that everyone felt about defying Mrs Gandhi, that Vajpayee captured so perfectly. Watching him that afternoon in Chhindwara, it was hard to believe that this was the man who had been able to create so much magic with his words.

The magic had been missing for more than a year. I had first noticed it when I interviewed him for *Ek Din Ek Jeevan* about six months before this election. I had travelled with him to Lucknow because he wanted the day to reflect his role as an MP. We travelled together from Delhi by train in the same first class carriage. He had a busy day and needed to rest so it was only the next morning when we got off at Lucknow that I got my first chance to speak to him. I remember asking him whether he had been shocked by the state of New Delhi railway station. It really looked terrible, as bad as the Lucknow or Patna stations. He just gave me a weary smile and said that I must remember that there were others that were worse.

When we finally got down to doing the interview it was this 'things could be worse' syndrome that seemed to have taken hold of his very thought process. He talked passionately enough though about things like the Babri Masjid. "You must remember that we did not start what happened. It was the Congress that opened the doors [to the mosque], the Congress that laid the foundation stone of a new Ram temple, Rajiv Gandhi who started his election campaign from Ayodhya in 1989 giving a call for Ram rajya... we came into the picture much later but when we came in we did so forcefully."

When it came, though, to wider political and serious economic matters, Vajpayee could come up with nothing more than the usual, dreary answers that Congress politicians are inclined to give. The public sector was inefficient but should not be abolished altogether. It could be made to function more efficiently. He had seen this happen in a factory in Lucknow. They were the words of a man who appeared not to have thought much about the economic failures that are at the root of our poverty.

He really revealed himself, though, when I asked him why he thought BJP governments in some of our bigger states had performed as badly as their Congress predecessors. It was as if he had never even noticed that this was true. Yes, he agreed, the BJP state governments had not performed much better than the Congress had, but this was because a change was needed at the Centre before there could be any real change. It was simply not a good enough answer from a man who hoped to soon lead a BJP government in Delhi.

He had paid just as little attention to working out for himself a list of priorities for the country. Yes, infrastructure was important and it should be a priority, but he had no idea of what he meant by this or what globalisation meant or what had



MANMOHAN SINGH

What had really gone wrong with the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh model of economic reform was that they had done nothing by way of administrative reform. Vajpayee should have thought about these things

gone wrong with the Congress's liberalisation programme.

Had he been paying attention he would have known what steps to take and which ones to avoid. What had really gone wrong with the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh model of economic reform was that they had done almost nothing by way of administrative reform. So, no matter how hard they tried to make life easy for investors, no matter how many licences they tried to abolish, in the end their best-laid plans would get eaten up by the greedy and self-serving network of officials who run India. Nobody had made any effort to bring them



NARASIMHA RAO





under control and, as the leader of the Opposition, Vajpayee should have thought about these things. Later, when he became Prime Minister and behaved exactly as if he were a Congress leader, I often thought back to this interview in Lucknow and wondered why it had not occurred to me then, on that long, hot day I spent with him, that he was a man who had long run out of ideas.

He was more passionate when he talked about feelings and problems. The feeling of despair that gripped him these days from time to time. "I sometimes feel that we are going nowhere, achieving nothing." He seemed equally disturbed about casteism. "Even when we choose the President of India we are looking not for someone who has the merit to become President but for someone of the right caste. Where will all this take us?"

Later that afternoon, I went with him to a village outside Lucknow where he was scheduled to inaugurate something or lay some foundation stone. Afterwards, under a *shamiana* that sizzled with the heat of the day, he delivered a lecture on the economy in the tones of a college professor. The audience, predictably, didn't understand.

He talked of Congress failures and they seemed not to understand one word of that either, just as they understood nothing of his reference to infrastructure. Sadly, his fine speech seemed to go over the heads of even the local press

who were as usual obsessed with minor political wranglings. Mulayam Singh said this in Delhi the other day, how do you respond? Mayawati has said this, how do you respond?"

It was a day of disillusionment and at the end of it I began to feel that the political bankruptcy that I had always charged Congress leaders with was now beginning to infect everyone. Just as what they called 'Congress culture' was beginning to influence every other political party. Who came to power in Delhi made no difference any more, since they would all end up ruling in much the same way as the Congress had.

This became painfully clear as soon as Vajpayee was sworn in as Prime Minister. From day one, in fact, when in an attempt to show continuity he made his first speech to the nation with a picture of Gandhiji hastily stuck into the bookcase behind him. It was a gesture that smacked of hypocrisy and tokenism, as indeed did some of the other things that he instantly started doing. He was sworn in a few months before Rajiv Gandhi's death anniversary and on that occasion duly trotted off on the samadhi round that Congress Prime Ministers made routinely. These were small things but significant in their own way because they indicated that he had no plans to change the way the country had been run so far, while what we needed desperately was change. We needed it more than almost anything else, but he seemed not to understand this. So, he did not even bother to change the concerns of the ministries that he had inherited. Primary education should have been top priority for any government coming to power and it could not possibly be dealt with unless we had a ministry for primary education, but Vajpayee seemed not to realise even this.

He continued with the ministry of human resource development, Rajiv Gandhi's replacement for a ministry of educa-

On Rajiv Gandhi's death anniversary a newly-appointed Vajpayee duly trotted off on the samadhi round that Congress Prime Ministers made routinely. It showed that he had no plans to change the way the country has been run so far

tion, and even praised Rajiv's scheme for setting up a network of mini-Doon Schools or Navodaya Vidyalayas. Doon School, sometimes described as India's Eton, was where Rajiv had studied and he believed that if he could set up government-run schools like this, then our abysmally low standards of state education would improve. It was a gimmick but Vajpayee found it praiseworthy. He could have made a dramatic difference to Indian education by insisting that the central government help states that went in for compulsory primary education, but he lost the chance by letting things be.

Later, everyone was to blame Jayalalitha's constant threats for the fact that Vajpayee's government seemed to do nothing at all. Even his biggest fans conceded privately that the real problem was that Vajpayee was not a good administrator. One of his closest aides said "Perhaps, we all expected too much. He had never been tested in the administrative area. We all assumed that he would know what to do and it came as a shock to us when we discovered that he did not." •

Excerpted with permission from *Lollipop Street: Why India will Survive its Politicians* by Tavleen Singh, published by Penguin Books India, Viking, price: Rs 395

No laments for a Lal

Why did the Congress ever support Bansi Lal?

Bansi Lal may have lost Haryana. But it is Sonia Gandhi who has lost face. It is hard for the Congress to explain to the people of Haryana why it supported Bansi Lal in the first place. The worst kind of family rule, nepotism and corruption had become the norm during the Haryana Vikas Party's governance.

The state's resources were milked dry by the coterie of bureaucrats and politicians that Bansi Lal and his family had cultivated. Lal's own image as a tough and ruthless administrator had degenerated into that of a weak and cruel bully who ran the state by dint of the CID. And Haryana, which had been such a promising state just a few years ago, with a steady economic growth and high revenue collection, had sunk, like neighbouring Punjab, into an apathetic morass of stagnation.

There was no development work, no roads, no fresh irrigation projects, no effort to seriously shore up the power situation. In fact, things were so bad that the state power and electricity board employees had begun to think of petitioning the chief minister for security, because there were repeated attacks on their homes by angry farmers, wanting *bijli* to run their pump sets to irrigate their fields. Ambala, for example, frequently had no more than two to four hours of electricity a day.

Things were no better in the urban areas of Haryana. Prohibition imposed early on by the HVP government robbed the state of nearly Rs 700 crore as revenue, leaving a huge deficit in the state Budget. Everyone knew prohibition was imposed only in name. Then, the chief minister and his family decided to impose a 'lifting fee' to remove prohibition. None of this money went

into the state's coffers. But it did increase the net worth of the Lal family to about Rs 1,000 crore.

In Haryana, colonisation of land — because the state is so close to Delhi and land prices have reached a point of stagnation in Delhi — has always been big business. All the Lals who have ruled Haryana have done it. But Bansi made colonisation the basis of his land-raising activity — for the party of course.

If you wanted to colonise and develop land in Haryana, the licence to do so would cost you Rs 8 crore per acre. You didn't have to pay it all together — you could pay in instalments. So if the government/chief minister granted even 100 licences to colonisers a year, that was a cool Rs 800 crore per year, tax free!

Then there were all the applications to change land use — mostly agricultural — to residential, industrial or commercial. This, too, had a price tag. So it was winning all the way.

The Congress knew how unpopular Bansi was. But for some reason, it did not take Bhajan Lal's advice that Bansi

Bansi Lal's image as a tough administrator had degenerated into that of a weak and cruel bully who ran the state by dint of the CID. And Haryana had sunk into an apathetic morass of stagnation

Lal was an old so-and-so and the Congress should never associate itself with him. The BJP withdrew support to Bansi Lal, who needed the support of just two MLAs, the Congress offered to bail him out and that was that.

Having done that, the Congress should have either persuaded/cajoled/bullied Lal into resigning from the chief ministership or kept some ace with it, making sure that Bansi Lal would have no chance to continue in office.

Instead, Lal met Sonia Gandhi, tied up with the Gurcharan Singh Tohra faction of the Akali Dal and Kanshi Ram's BSP, and generally announced to the world that he had *laddoos* in both hands. He had managed to save his government and tie up with reliable allies for the Lok Sabha elections.

Exactly when the Congress discovered that Bansi Lal was not going to keep his word and quit the chief ministership is unclear. What is certain is that the Congress was unmoved by Lal's unpopularity and the charges of corruption against him and his family when it decided to support him. Otherwise why would it have helped him in the first place? So saying helplessly that Bansi Lal didn't keep his word so the party withdrew support to him one week after pledging it can cut no ice with anyone.

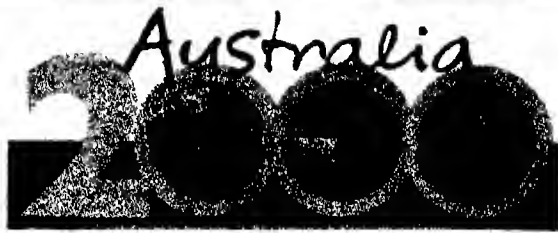
What is amazing is not just the naivete of the Congress but its lack of information. One of the premises on which it had based its strategy in Haryana was that the HVP would merge into the Congress. But surely it should have known that strong anti-Congress politicians like Maniram Godara would never have Bansi Lal merge the HVP with the Congress? And how would the Congress have tackled Bhajan Lal's intransigence?

No one knows. Possibly not even Pranab Mukherjee who was feted and welcomed by the grateful Bansi Lal just ten days ago when he went to Chandigarh as the emissary of Sonia Gandhi.

What happens now? With the Governor determined to prevent horse-trading elections will arrive. Bansi Lal will be lucky if he can retain even one MLA. But it is the Congress which has to find answers and provide them to the angry populace of Haryana. Why did the party support Bansi Lal in the first place? •



ASHOK VAHIA



Business with pleasure

The Sydney Olympics could be an excellent opportunity to boost Indo-Australian trade

What's common among a gold for Indian hockey, a business date with an Australian CEO and a visit to the magnificent Darling Harbour? The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games!

It is expected to add AUD\$ 7.3 billion to Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), create 150,000 full-and-part-time jobs and bring an extra 1.3 million visitors to Australia, according to an independent KPMG Peat Marwick study covering the period from 1994 to 2004. It will boost Australia's Balance of Trade and add \$3.5 billion to net export earnings in this period.

But how do enjoying an Indian hockey match, a business meeting and a Darling Harbour visit coincide? Simple. Over the games in 2000, the Business Club Australia Business Centre, at the Darling Harbour in the heart of Sydney, will provide the ultimate site for you to do business. Talk about mixing business with pleasure!

"The club is about the value of networking and building positive connections to succeed in business. It puts you in touch with compatible business people to build fruitful relationships," says Rod MC Geoh, international patron of Business Club Australia and chief executive of the Olympic Bid Committee. Definitely an unique concept that is totally

different from the usual marketing and promotional activities associated with an event of this stature, according to marketing wizards. The novelty is in the very idea of making Australia the unique selling proposition of this strategy. "As the global spotlight sweeps over this island continent in the run up to the Olympics, it will illuminate a land offering great opportunities for international business," explains Richard Francis, trade commissioner, Austrade. This initiative draws on the strength of the government and the private enterprise across Australia. By registering with the club you can access information hitherto unavailable. And if you happen to visit Sydney during the Olympics you will receive a wide range of benefits to assist you in doing business anywhere in Australia. And all this at no additional cost—a bonanza for sure for the corporate executive!

"This unprecedented national approach to marketing Australian business capability has found takers across



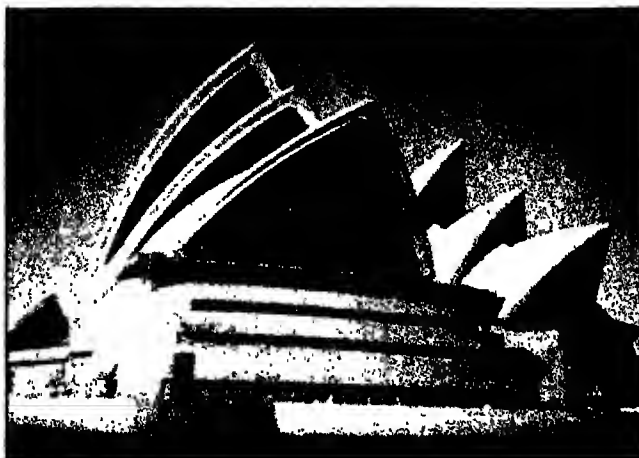
the globe," asserts Rob Laurie, Australian High Commissioner in India, proudly. "The club is expected to rope in over 25,000 members," Says Dr Kenichi Ohmae of Ohmae & Associates, "Australia is inherently very attractive. You have unique strengths like a high quality workforce." And investment 2000 is a national investment promotion strategy that provides a time and cost-effective opportunity to evaluate Australia's growing potential as a strategic business destination. It is a proactive campaign to unite global corporations to explore Australia's comparative advantages, commercial and technological. Says a member-businessman from Bombay, "While the strategy is global, the very fact that the club expects 600 members from the Indian subcontinent, speaks volumes for fortunes to be made." At least that will be some consolation in case India's lacklustre performance in the Olympics disappoints again.

But before painting a rosy picture it is



"Indian IT firms could team up with ours and target the third market"

RICHARD FRANCIS, Trade Commissioner, AUSTRADE



The Olympic stadium (left) and Sydney Harbour: ultimate destination for business executives in the summer of 2000?

wise to glance through our business relations with this Kangaroo country.

■ Opportunity for Indo-Australian ventures exists in mining, infrastructure i.e. power, ports, roads, telecommunications, petroleum and natural gas and agriculture.

■ Bi-lateral trade between India and Australia crossed the \$ 2.5 billion mark in 1997-98. Textiles, clothing and accessories, chemicals and related products and engineering goods accounted for almost all of the increase in India's export for the year 1997-98. And what do we import? Wool and wool tops, ores and concentrates. India is also a major destination for Australia's diamonds, for cutting and polishing.

■ The total value of Australian investment in India during August 1990-91 to June 1998 was Rs 33363.5 million, accounting for just 2 per cent of the total approved investment.

■ During the year 1997, a record number of 61 Indo-Australian joint ventures with a cumulative value of Rs 4316.72 million was approved. Significant among the Indo-Australian ventures are companies such as Telstra, Matrix, JNA, Stanilite and AWA in telecommunications. The largest Australian investment in India is the ANZ Grindlays Bank. CRA, Ranison, Goldfield are pro-

minent in mining. Jardine Flaming among Foreign Institutional Investors (FI), offers Australian opportunity to invest in Indian companies and GIO has positioned itself to enter the insurance sector in association with Sammar group.

■ A survey conducted by the National Centre for South Asian Studies, Melbourne, concluded that 73 per cent of Australian companies reported profitability in their Indian operations and 80 per cent have expressed intentions of expanding their investment base in India.

Yet there are many more opportunities to be explored and captured. The Business Club, one hopes, will eliminate situations where Australian companies interested in collaborating with Indian companies in various sectors are unable to identify or access details of such prospective Indian partners seeking foreign collaborators. The process for going through the Indian Investment Centre, concerned ministries and apex bodies are characterised not only by inordinate delays but also absence of any results.

Says Ashish Somany, managing director, Somany Worfted Limited, "Apart from interacting with the Australian corporates we shall get to interact with prominent global players gathering there. That will certainly be an eye-opening experience for most of us."

He explains, "Business transactions with Australians is an experience unlike those with other western countries. With 5 per cent of Australian population being Indians, we feel more at home as the atmosphere is more Asian and not typically European." Adds Richard Francis of Austrade, "Indian IT firms could team up with ours, and target third market." He elucidates with the example of the Japanese market. Indians have had more success there than the Australians.

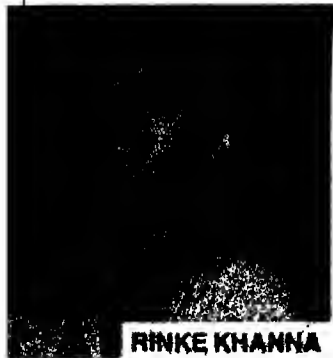
A member in this industry is Aptech, but the Aussies don't intend to ride on our initiatives. Australia manufactures quality automotive components which if sourced could enhance the value of our automotive exports. Are the Indian players listening?

In case of the agri-industries the opportunities could be explored in the area of improving agricultural infrastructure in India with Australian assistance. "The mining and food processing sectors could definitely witness some concrete deals," adds Ashok Ummad of the Indo-Australia Joint Business Council, FICCI.

Austrade reported that some Australian exporters diversified away from the Asian five, South Korea and the ASEAN states after exports plunged by AUD\$ 2.6 billion in the first quarter of 1998. This had dampened the expected growth in GDP. But with the Olympics round the corner, the spin-off from this enterprising initiative is expected to transform the scenario. And if the Indians could be smart enough (and we are not just speaking entrepreneurs here), they could be witnessing a gold for the Indian hockey team while clinching a deal with the Aussies. And a view of the sunset at Darling Harbour may well be on the horizon. •

Devdatta Das/New Delhi

PABITRA DAS



RINKE KHANNA

The denial is now official. Rinke Khanna is not romantically involved with Sanjay Suri, her co-star in *Pyar Mein Kabhi Kabhi*.

By the way is it a coincidence that this denial has come through only after the pre-release publicity for the film is over?

Sushmita Sen is now involved with yet another married man. Her affair with Vikram Bhatt ended rather messily and Sushmita sought comfort in Sanjay Kapoor's arms. The two were acting together in *Strf Tum* and became very close during the outdoor shoot. But Kapoor flew back home to marry long-time girlfriend Mahip and Sen was left nurs-

ing a broken heart, yet again. Not for long, though. No sooner was the recently-married Sanjay back from his honeymoon that he began seeing Sushmita again, and the lovers took off from where they had left off.

That's all very well, but where does that leave Mahip who is expecting her first baby later this year?



SHAH RUKH KHAN

The film industry's response to the Kargil crisis appears to be the launch of a new movie starring Govinda, titled *Kargil*. But how about doing something that helps our brave soldiers, rather than just stealing from their lives to make a fast buck? No, nobody in the movie business seems willing to do that.

Even when some stars have made a contribution, it has been insultingly small. Take Shah Rukh Khan, for instance, who has just spent around Rs 8-9 crore acquiring a bungalow and rakes it in via star shows, advertisements, movies and the like. How much is he willing to give towards the Kargil martyrs? A princely sum of Rs 50,000!

Surely you can do better than that Shah Rukh.

Salman Khan is currently caught in the horns of a dilemma. No, he's not mulling over whether he should marry Somy Ali or not. She is out of the picture by now, having flown off to America to begin life afresh.

The problem Salman has to solve is which of the two women in his life he should marry. While he is madly in love with Aishwarya, her parents are bitterly opposed to the match. And it is not clear whether Ms Rai will summon up the courage to stand up to them or whether she will buckle under the pressure.

Of course, Salman could always marry his best buddy Neelam who has always been there for him. But while they are very close, there isn't any chemistry between them, like there is between Ash and Salman.

So, will Salman go in for romance? Or will he settle for humdrum domesticity?

We promise to keep you updated.

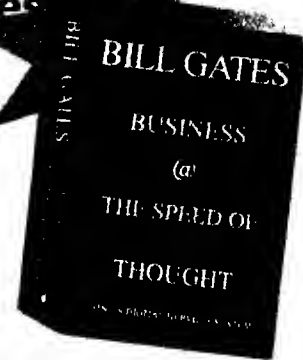




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Dancers from Kerala take a Kathakali adaptation of King Lear to Shakespeare's Globe

If Shakespeare were to see it, he would have been more than intrigued. A clutch of actors wearing incredible make-up and flamboyant costumes had descended on Shakespeare's Globe — the theatre on the bank of the Thames where he worked and where his plays were performed. The players had come from the Indian state of Kerala to stage their version of the Bard's *King Lear*.

Instead of the 16th Century doublet and hose, this Lear appeared in elaborate Kathakali costumes and make-up and danced to the frenetic drumming of the *chenda* and the *maddalam* (percussion instruments). Malayalam songs sung in the *sopana* (ritual chanting) style set the mood.

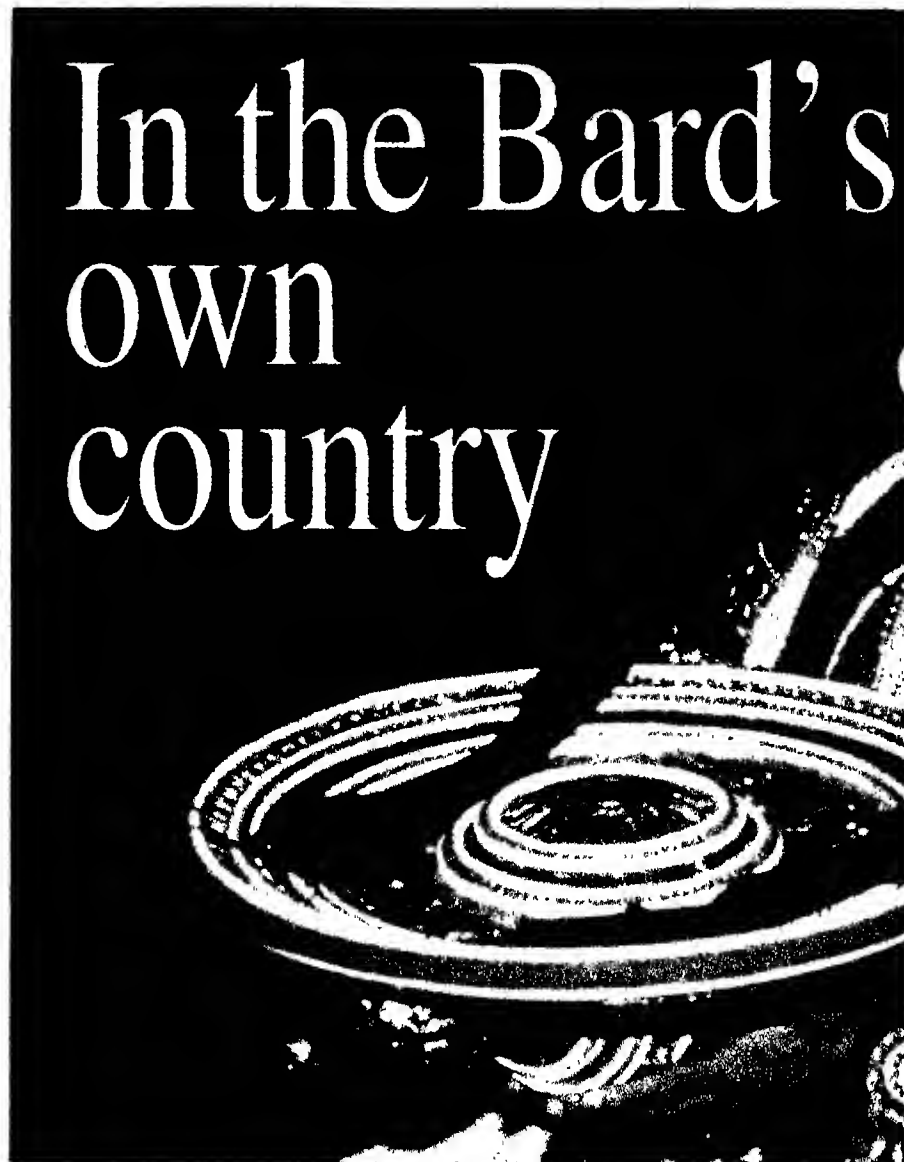
As living proof of the universality of Shakespeare's plays, the 400th anniversary season of The Globe Theatre was celebrated by staging a Kathakali version of *King Lear* — an Indo-British-French production, presented by the Annette Leday/Keli Company and the International Shakespeare Globe Centre Ltd.

"We chose *King Lear* because it is essentially a simple story," says McRuvie, who has adapted the play from the original and is directing it. "All classical Kathakali plays are based on simple stories. And given the amount of action *King Lear* has — the love scenes, the war scenes — it was ideal for Kathakali."

The original *King Lear* was edited and adapted to suit the style of Kathakali. Keeping the basic plot of *King Lear* and his three daughters and the division of the kingdom intact, the character of the King of France was developed to play up the love element. The Gloucester sub-plot was edited to reduce the play to the basic storyline and focus on the core characters and the domestic theme.

"The element of Kathakali suits the larger-than-life characters in the play

In the Bard's own country



and makes it quite spectacular," said McRuvie.

Adapting *King Lear* to the Kathakali format took nearly a year. The adapted version was translated into Malayalam by K. Marumakan Raja and put into verse. Next, the musicians took up the script. In keeping with the traditional format of *slokas* (short summary sung before each scene) and *padams* (poems which are sung out and contain the dialogue) the piece was set to tune. There are also long moments of frenzied drumming and percussions which alternate between dialogue and songs, to which dancers romp over the stage with wild exuberance.

Padmanabhan Nair as King Lear

While McRuvie took care of Shakespeare, the beautiful French Kathakali dancer Annette Leday, who plays Cordelia, choreographed the production.

"It was a wonderful experience working with my guru and adapting the traditional Kathakali style to Shakespeare," said Leday. "Performing at Shakespeare's Globe is a different thrill altogether."

Leday, who learnt Kathakali under Padmanabhan Nair (who is playing Lear) in Kerala 20 years back and has been choreographing works involving Indian and Western artists for the past ten years under the Annette Leday/Keli



Stagecraft

How the Globe theatre rose from the ashes

The original Globe theatre was built for William Shakespeare's company of players on the south bank of the Thames in 1599, during the reign of Elizabeth I. It soon became the most popular playhouse in London.

In 1613 a spark from a stage cannon set fire to the thatched roof of the theatre and it was burnt out. A second Globe was built the same year on the same foundations with a tiled roof and more ornate interior. Shakespeare died in 1616 and the Puritans closed the theatre in 1642.

In 1970 Sam Wanamaker founded the Shakespeare Globe Trust dedicated to an international understanding of Shakespeare in performance. Restoration work started in 1987 and construction began in 1993.

On 12 June 1997 the Queen and Prince Philip attended the opening of Shakespeare's Globe on the south bank of the River Thames, opposite St Paul's Cathedral in London. The theatre looks exactly as it did in Shakespeare's times, with bays, pillars, wooden benches to sit on, and the standing space in front of the stage. It is based on designs by Inigo Jones, a 17th Century architect whose designs were discovered in an Oxford library.

The theatre's aim is to explore the impact of Shakespeare on other cultures by bringing international productions to the Globe. The programme is called Globe to Globe and has featured a Zulu *Macbeth* in 1997 and a Cuban *The Tempest* in 1998. This year, of course, it's the turn of the Kathakali *King Lear*.



Company, was delighted to work with the masters of Kathakali from Kerala.

"It was a constant process of exchange, we worked together learning from them and asking them to adapt as well, and the end product is something unique and intense," said Leday.

"The problem with presenting such a show was that the audience did not understand Malayalam or had never seen Kathakali," said McRuvie. "So we gave up the traditional slow build-up and went for something totally different. In the end it doesn't matter that the audience doesn't understand the text and songs, the gestures and movements are so emotive that they can readily follow

the storyline."

For a bit of fun, the two wicked sisters — Goneril and Regan — are being played by male dancers wearing exaggerated busts. King Lear is painted in red and green to symbolise royalty and violence, the King of France is in green, which stands for nobility and virtue, the wicked sisters are in black and dark blue to represent the primitive instincts of man, and Cordelia is presented more realistically, in a sparkling orange.

The character of the Fool played by Kalamandalam Manoj Kumar is inspired by the character and make-up used by the *Vidushak*, the court jester whose role is central in Kutiyattam, the Sanskrit

theatre of Kerala, which is the principal literary source of the Kathakali tradition.

As the actors walked on to the sets of Shakespeare's Globe and the curtains trembled to reveal an imposing King Lear, who took centre-stage dressed in elaborate costume, and garishly made-up in green and red, the atmosphere was electric.

Goneril and Regan provided many laughs as they wooed the King of France. Cordelia was expressive and graceful. The battle scene brought the house down as Goneril and Regan fought for the attentions of the King of France. Quite an awesome experience. •

Shrabani Basu/London



(L-R) Asif Seth, Mini Mathur and Cyrus Sahukar

WACKY, WACKIER, WACKIEST

The evening was a swell affair, but the funkiest part of the 19-June two-and-a-half-hour show at Bombay's Famous Studio was probably the Wackiness Quotient Round. It was the glitzy finale of the second 'Colgate Gel & MTV VJ Hunt' for the 'Most Wanted VJ No.1.' Over the past six weeks or so, more than 6,000 guys and girls, all aspiring veejays, had sent in their applications from places as far as Ladakh and Shillong, even Kanyakumari down south. Unfortunately, to be a veejay you need to be wacky. So, only 12 made it to the final where they were quizzed and probed by a panel of judges that had celebs like Simi Garewal, Raveena

Tandon, Arjun Rampal and Karan Johar among others. The sequence of events on the 1,200-square-foot stage with 40,000 watts of pulsating background music unfolded like this: the Wackiness Quotient Round evaluated how swanky they could be; the Grey Matter Round mercifully didn't test scholastic aptitudes, just how witty they were; the Live and Direct Round was the dry-run for bigger things and the final Fashion Round judged how well you styled yourself. The three who finally made it were Asif Seth, Mini Mathur and Cyrus Sahukar. "We're glad to add Mini, Cyrus and Asif to the MTV VJ brigade," said Natasha Malhotra, executive producer, MTV India. "[The] three... were selected for their... personality and style which reflects the MTV spirit of Enjoy!" Yes, and the ability for non-stop wackiness.

THE ALTRUISTIC ROAD TO KARGIL

High patriotism to filmic inspiration: for smart people it's just a short, little road. After some of Bollywood's sinewy icons jiggled and flexed muscles at sundry charity shows, the Kargil conflict now gets cinematic extension. Directed by Shyam Maheshwari, the movie, titled *Kargil*, which will be shot in Jammu & Kashmir for that touch of authenticity, has Govinda's nephew



Aryan in the lead. The all-stop Kargil altruistic express also picked up a few other celebrity passengers. In the wee hours of the morning Delhi-ites, who sacrificed the luxury of lazing on in bed, congregated at Nehru Park to listen to a recital by flautist Hari



COMPASSION'S THE KEY

Empathy in times of shameless self-promotion, proactive Hollywood icons and an Indian musical genius raising money for under-privileged kids; maybe compassion's the first step to selflessness? Bollywood's music whizkid A.R. Rahman now

figures alongside elite stars like Jessica Lange, Goldie Hawn, Susan Sarandon, Brooke Shields, Liam Neeson and singer Neneh Cherry, etc., in the international fund-raising campaign, 'Listen'. At a recent press conference at hotel Leela Kempinski in Bombay, Rahman and the

Prasad Chaurasia who was performing as part of the NDMC series on morning ragas. The money was sent to the Kargil relief fund. The audience, say organisers, was bigger than usual and though the real attraction may have been the guy with the flute, the donation was a spur-of-the-moment decision by the master who couldn't control his emotions. Elsewhere, **Nirmal Pandey**, who stars in the play version of hit Hollywood movie *The Square Circle*, got the producers of his latest film, *Ham Tum Pe Marte Hain*, to promise to forward 50 per cent of the proceeds and his entire acting fee to the relief fund. We are impressed.

Oscar-winning actress announced their involvement with the US\$ 40 million millennium project which will rope in 99 of the world's leading artistes. "Having started work at the age of 11 after losing my father at nine, I understand the plight of kids who have to work for their survival," said **Rahman**. Meanwhile **Lange**, who along with Indian visual artists **Sheela Gowda** and **Bhupen Kakkar**, spent five days with Bombay's street-children for a documentary film, came away "impressed". As she said later, it was their "cheerfulness and generosity extending even to a stranger like me, despite the daunting circumstances they live in" that touched her.



SOME COMFORT FOR OUR STARS

For the past two months, some hard-hearted and cynical cricket theorists, men who've probably never played a game in their whole life, have gone on piling abuse on our national stars. True, they couldn't win the World Cup, and again they messed up when it mattered most; but that's no way to treat them. Now Zenith computers has offered motivation (could be anchoring also) solace to three of our cricketers. In a year not so good for the country's cricketing pride, it has apparently pardoned these virtual sinners for not playing as a team. It went ahead and announced the Zenith one-up players award. The heroes from left to right: **Rahul Dravid** for best batsman. He scored the maximum runs in the World Cup, then he figured in the record-breaking 348-run partnership with **Sonali Ganguly**. **Debashish Mohanty** got the best bowler's award. Plus, we got a glimpse into his own self. Graham Thorpe was the guy who got singled. And **Ajay Jadeja** got the award for best fielder. They displayed exceptional talent," said **Raj Sarat**, CMD of India's second-largest PC vendor. That is the other extreme.

WHERE HAVE THE GUYS GONE...

She got into scraps with Channel V people when she was veejaying for them, broke up with her husband, the less-famous **Nitin Bali**, then bagged roles in a couple of serials and is currently anchoring the *Bakeman's Ooh! La La!* countdown show on Star Plus. Now, in her post-break-up sizzle to centre-stage, the svelte, insouciant-looking **Ruby Bhatia** has scalped another prize — a chat show on Star Plus called *Kinetic Mega Show* where she plays hostess. The show promises to be pure entertainment and nothing else. Every week, a celebrity will be invited in for an informal chat and "surprise sessions". The list of guests include Bollywood heart-throbs like **Manisha Koirala**, **Sushmita Sen**, **Sonali Bendre** and **Shilpa Shetty**. Have all the guys disappeared, Ruby? Or, don't they measure up?



the River Sutpa

Cruising down the Ganga through six districts and eight centuries

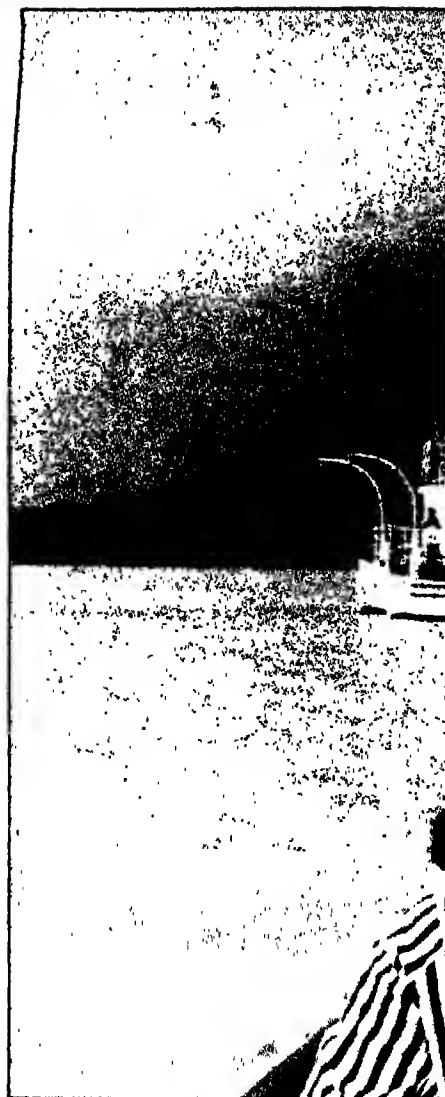
Day 1, 3.00 pm. Baharampur

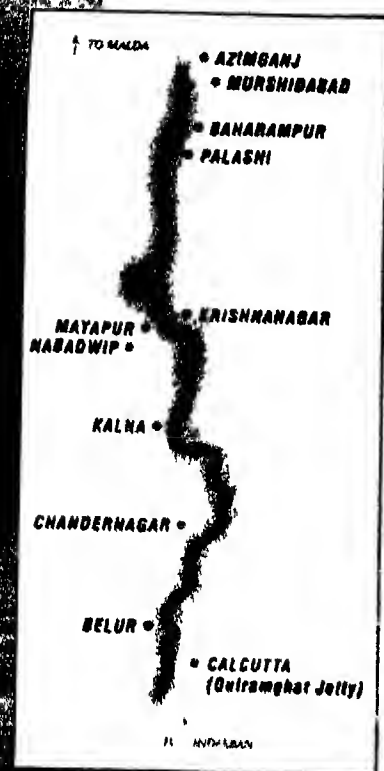
The sky was soot black. The vessel a dazzling white, thrown in relief against the turgid river. The waters were a swirling, eddying mass of ochre-coloured liquid, with dead branches, human excreta and the odd dog carcass floating on it. Not a very promising sight for the motley crowd of cynical journo, exasperated travel operators and exhausted tourists (the bus journey from Calcutta to Baharampur was delayed by three hours when the Maruti van carrying a TV crew which was trailing the bus got hit by a truck). Even as they quickly scurried on to the motorboat to reach the sanctuary of the launch before the rains started pelting and tucked into a late but gorgeously appetising afternoon lunch complete with typical Bengali delicacies as *shukto* and *muror dual*, the talking point was the seeming intractability of the programme. Heritage, adventure, culture... history, romance, discovery... nawabs, the Bhakti movement, the East India Company... all in the course of a cruise along the Ganga! Isn't the West Bengal tourism department biting off more than it can chew?

Day 1, 5.00 pm. Lalbagh

This was the capital of Siraj-ud-daullah, the last independent nawab of Bengal before the East India Company began running the show. The remains of a dilapidated tonga stands in one's way at the entrance to Wasif Manzil, the residence of the last nawab of Murshidabad under British rule, Wasif Ali Mirza. Inside, in the sprawling Durbar hall (where the courtesan Kazzanbai once created peacocks on the floor by dancing on flour), dressing-tables, writing bureaux, book-shelves stacked with copies of *The Calcutta Gazette* have all been pushed against the walls. Rainwater is seeping down the darkened suite. The bed, a massive relic from the last century, is covered with a garish, velvety bedspread.

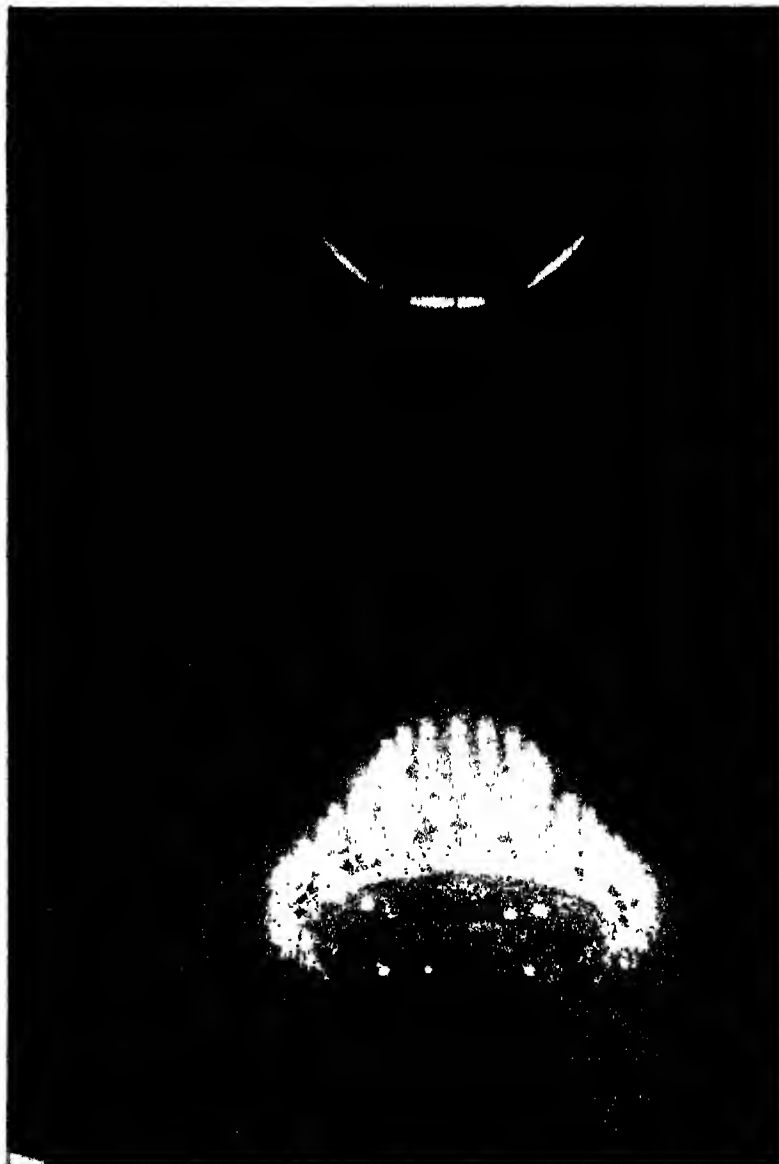
"There were a lot of marble statues, carpets and valuable crockery in these rooms, which have disappeared over the years," says Syed Reza Ali Mirza, grandson of the last nawab and now the superintendent of Wasif Manzil. "Till 1985, this place was managed by a private trust. Things improved somewhat after the Government of India took charge." But an authoritative directory of the items on display, and better maintenance seems to be the need of the hour.





(Clockwise from left) The journey begins at Baharampur, dinner on board, in front of Hazariduar Palace, Lalbagh



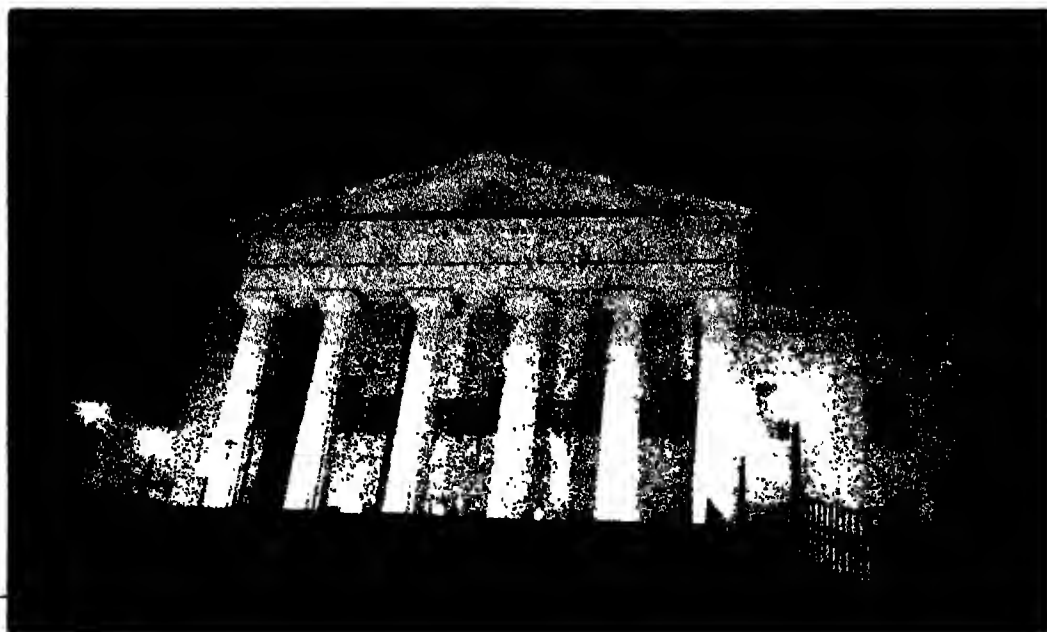


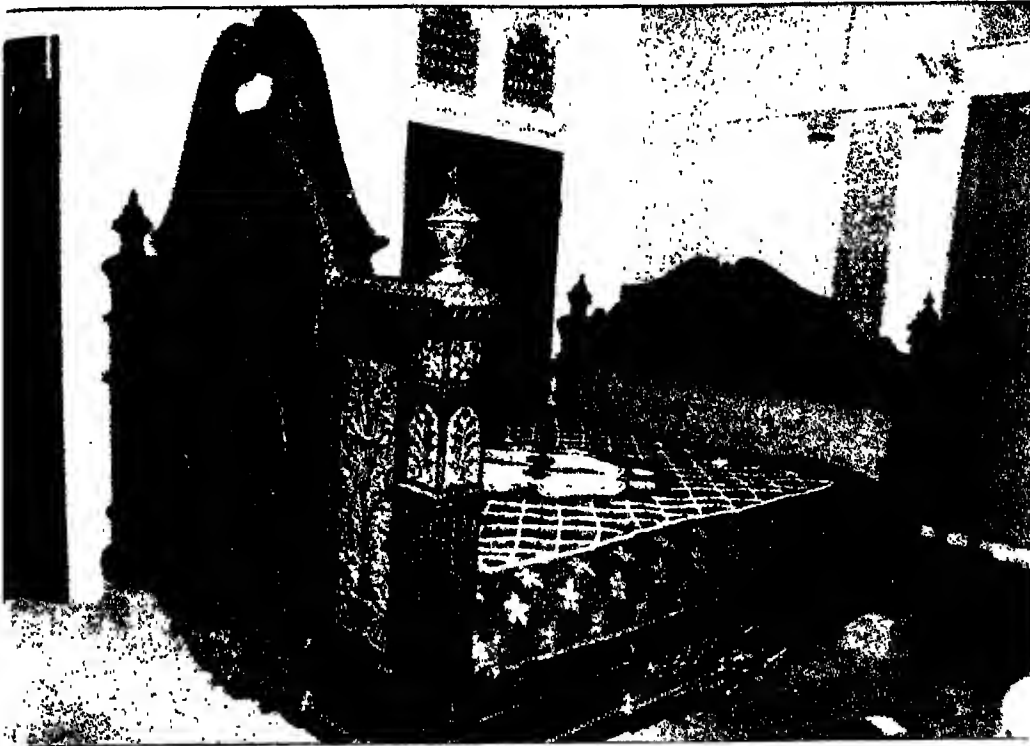
The Imambara built by Nawab Feradun Jah in 1848 looks like a derelict army barrack. The plaster has peeled off from the imposing frontal facade — round, cusped arches flanked on either side by Tuscan columns — and some of the doors and windows are missing.

But the Hazarduari Palace, built in 1828 by Nawab Humayun Jah and planned by the architect General McLeod Duncan is dazzling still, illuminated specially to give the cruise-party a better view. It looks quite out-of-this-world under the inky black night sky with a little mosque silhouetted against the structure. It's a treasure trove really, the largest repository of paintings, Grecian sculptures, three-dimensional Company School paintings, silver



(Clockwise from right)
Hazarduari Palace;
Chandelier inside the
Durbar Hall; Nawab
Humayun Jah confers with
architect McLeod Duncan;
Reza Ali Mirza, grandson of
the last nawab





The bed of Wasif Ah Mirza, the last nawab of Murshidabad under British rule (left) inside the Durbar Hall of Wasif Manzil (below)



sedan chairs, ivory-inlaid palanquins and other memorabilia of Bengal's nawabs.

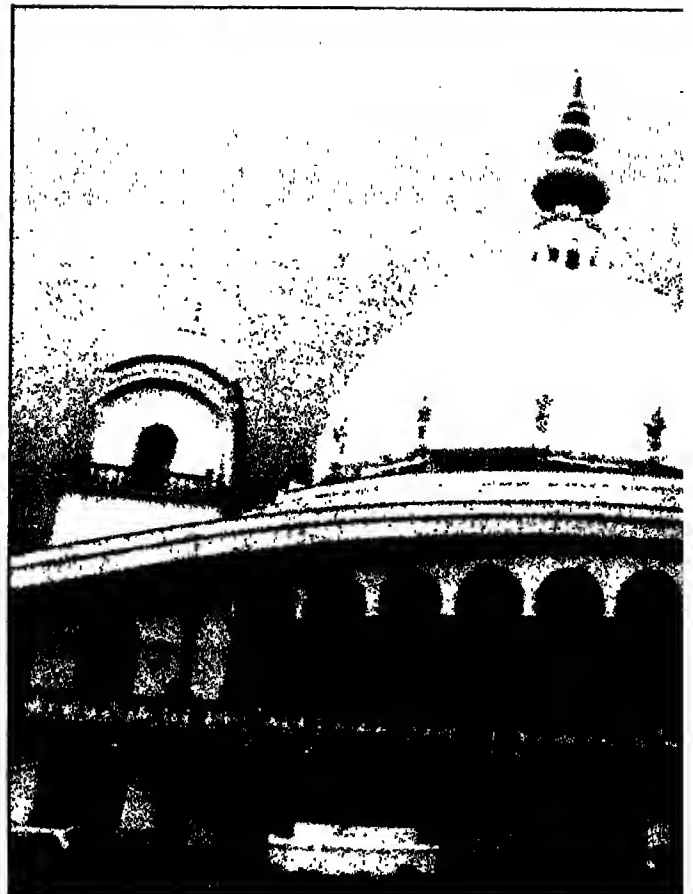
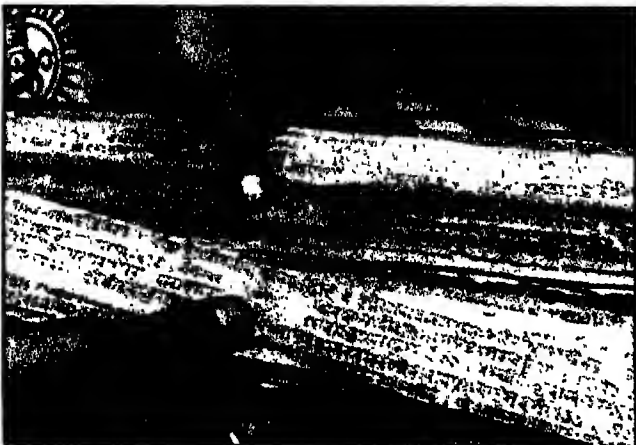
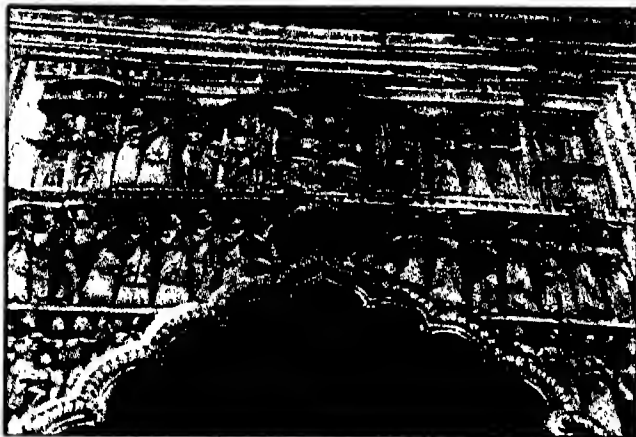
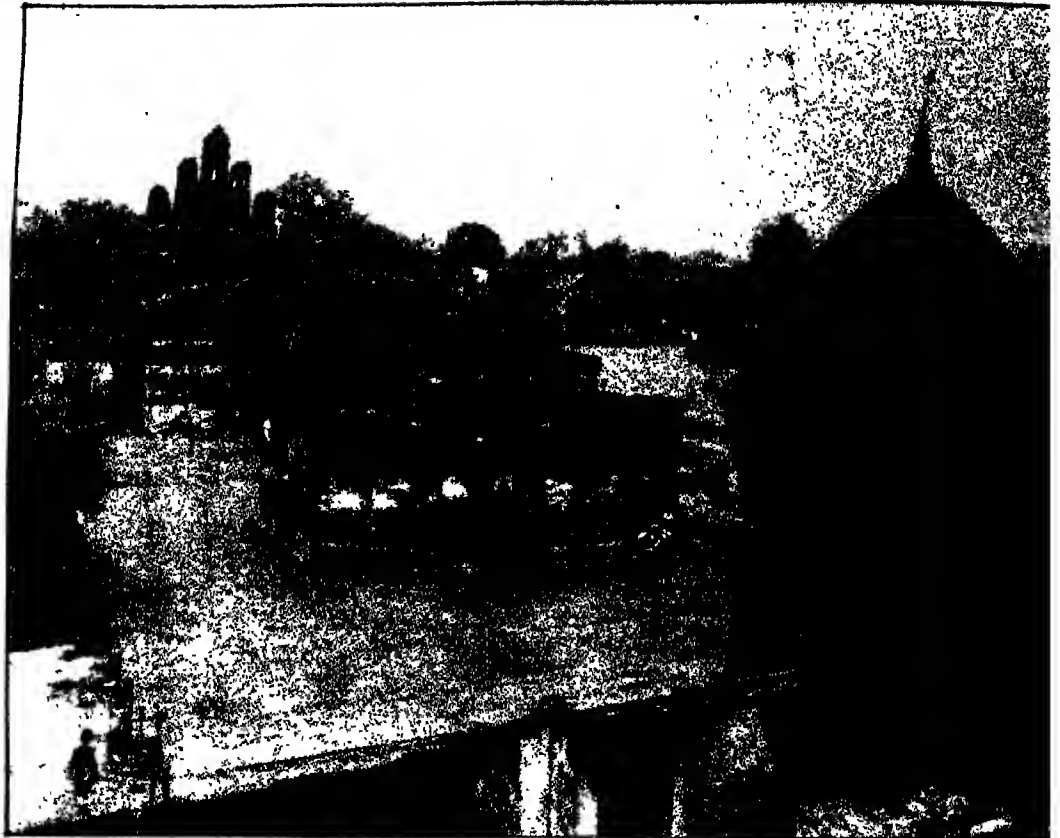
Noor Mohammad, who takes us around the armoury, intently answers every persistent query about how miniature canons can be used as revolvers, and points out that Siraj-ud-Daullah's sword was a good five feet in length. The crowd hangs upon his every word as he moves on from Nadir Shah's headgear to Mir Kasim's dagger, to a shield used by the first nawab of Murshidabad, Murshid Quli Khan. A fellow-member of the press points out that a signboard at the entrance says most of these weapons have only been 'attributed to' these historic figures. But nobody pays attention.

Day 1, 2.00 pm, on board, Chitragh.

Over a dinner of chicken *chomp* and mutton *biriyani*, cooked in 'authentic' nawabi style, I ask Jayanta Sanyal, principal secretary, tourism, West Bengal, what he thinks of the row of shanties that have sprung up along the courtyard of the Hazarduari Palace. These shops sell anything from local artefacts to tea and biscuits, littering the place with gay abandon. "The encroachers will be relocated," says Sanyal, "but that's the Archaeological Survey of India's job."

Talking of heritage, why were not Khosh Bag (the garden which houses the grave of Siraj); Kagra Mosque, famous for its huge minars, slender turrets and the flight of steps underneath which Murshid Quli Khan's mortal remains are buried; and Nabadwip, the birthplace of saint and social reformer Sri Chaitanya not included in the itinerary? Sanyal talks of the time con-

(Clockwise from right)
Terracotta temples at
Kaina; prayer dance at
Mayapur; a new memorial
for Prabhupada, the
founder of ISKCON; a
manuscript written by Sri
Chaitanya; terracotta
panels on the walls of Char
Bangla, Azimganj





straint which does not allow too many stops in a three-day cruise, but adds that visits to places of particular interest could be undertaken individually.

Does he think people would buy this tour for a steep Rs 5000, when anyone could easily do those handful of heritage sites on one's own for less than Rs 1000? "But this is a tour which is very special," insists Sanyal. "All the artefacts in Hazarduari have been displayed, the facade has been given a facelift, the Durbar Hall has been opened and the camera allowed in. And the biggest value for money, I'd say, is the fresh air from the river."

Fair enough. That's one thing no one can dispute the quality of!

Day 2, 6.00 am, *Azimganj*

We are in Char Bangla, four temples enclosing a small courtyard, built in 1755 by Rani Bhavani of Natore. Siraj-ud-Daullah once famously fell in love with her daughter Tara and antagonised the mother for good. So much so that she joined forces with the British to oust Siraj, thus paving the way for 200 years of foreign rule.

The facades attract because of their ornamental brickwork, depicting themes drawn from the Hindu epics and the Puranas. Figurines of Kali, Ravana and Makara peep out of the cornice, jostling for space with musicians and soldiers. One marvels at the precision, the fineness with which every movement has been arrested in terracotta sculptures by the nameless artisans.

Day 2, 4.00 pm, *Mayapur*

The journey to the world's largest centre of the Vaishnava cult, the ISKCON, takes a good eight hours. Heavy rain lashes against the steamer, it bobs on the water, the people sitting on the deck run for cover but the rains are faster. A little boat gets turned over before it can unfurl the sail. A big chunk of the river bank collapses into the water, head-on. In the distance, thick black clouds are separated by a streak of light. It looks surreal.

By the time we reach Mayapur, one is drenched to the bones. I cling to a fellow-traveller, barefoot on a slippery ground, underneath the umbrella we are sharing, winding our way through the Oriental garden to *gurukul*, a natty row of designer thatched cottages with mud walls, where the devotees of Lord Krishna are conducting a discourse. It seems like a little island, oblivious of the world outside, which is drowning.

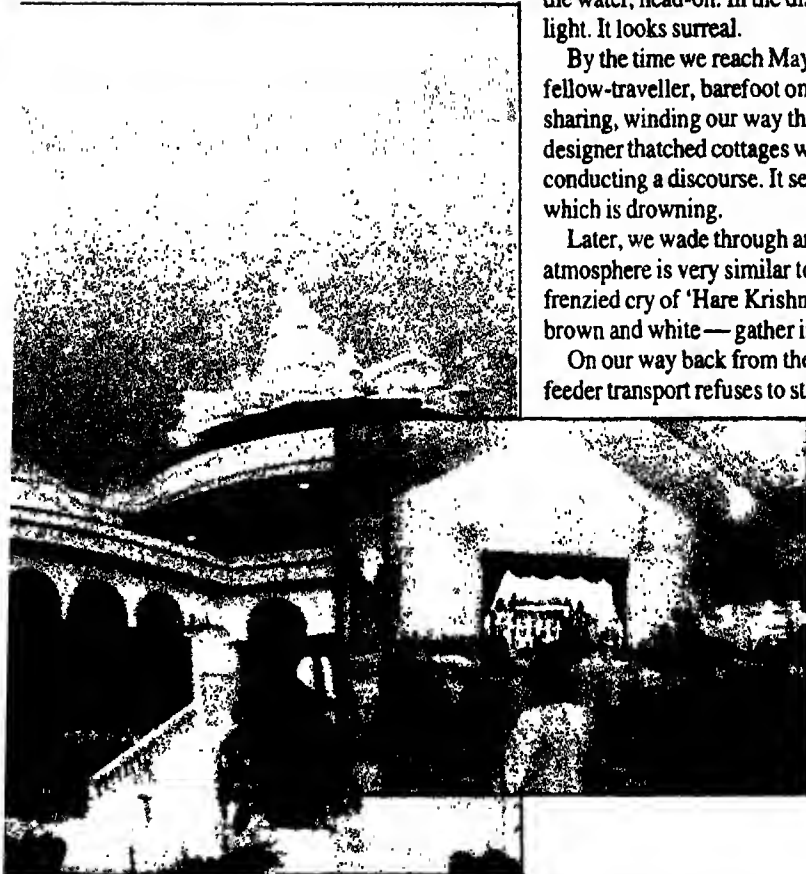
Later, we wade through ankle-deep water to the Chandradaya temple, where the atmosphere is very similar to a party. The quasi-Charleston danced to the frenzied cry of 'Hare Krishna' tears through the air as beautiful people — black, brown and white — gather in celebration.

On our way back from the shore to the launch, the country boat being used as feeder transport refuses to start. As the boatman pumps hard at

the motor, the boat starts drifting away from the shore, but completely in the opposite direction from our vessel, towards an uncanny light somewhere faraway in the horizon. Minutes pass, and for a while it looks like this could be the end of the journey. Finally, a motorboat comes along to tow us back home.

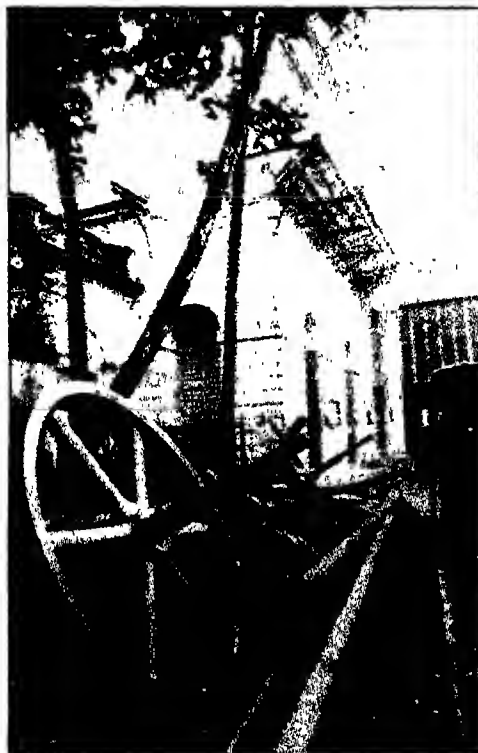
Day 3, *Kalna, Chandannagore and Belur*

More terracotta in Kalna, most famous for its 108 Shiva temples built in 1809 by the Maharaja of Burdwan. The temples, now standing in an unweeded garden, are arranged in two concentric circles, with such architectural mastery that the *Shivlingas* inside them all seem to point to a single direction. Kalna was also the haunt of





(Clockwise from the top)
Ferrying cattle atop a
country boat; a shrine
housing Sri Chaitanya's
footprints, Kalna; a band
playing at the Dupleix
Palace, Chandannagore,
the remains of a royal
carriage, Lalbagh



Sri Chaitanya. The priest in Mahaprabhu Mandir lovingly unwraps a manuscript for us. It's a Maithili translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, supposedly written by Sri Chaitanya, in his own hand. The story may be apocryphal but the calligraphy is breathtaking!

As soon as we step into the Governor's Palace in Chandannagore, a French colony only 50 years back, a band pipes up, playing a welcome ditty. The museum is full of 19th century French furniture, vases and glassware, apart from journals published by the freedom fighters in the earlier part of this century (Chandannagore was the hotbed of revolutionary activities during India's struggle for freedom) The star attraction is, of course, Dupleix's bed (the French governor between 1731 and 1741) which has a little staircase attached.

The last stop is Belur, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission and the abode of Swami Vivekananda. The river looks most tame and serene in this place. At the evening prayer session, a thousand monks break into a song in praise of Sri Ramakrishna—the eclectic 19th Century saint whose teachings of universal love and brotherhood still has a tremendous pull. The chant resonates through the prayer hall and seeps into the consciousness.

Day 3, 8.00 pm, Calcutta

Can this be the city we all know? Or has it been transformed overnight by the touch of a magic wand? Tall buildings etched against the night sky look down on us, their lights shimmering in the water, as we gently sail along under the majestic structures of the Howrah Bridge and the Vidyasagar Setu. The band plays louder, working towards a grand finale but gets drowned under the sound of laughter and goodbyes and busy exchange of addresses on scraps of papers.

But the river looks as nonchalant as ever. It just keeps rolling along. •

Text: Chitralekha Basu
Photographs: Tarapada Bannerjee



Janata Dal leaders J.H. Patel, Ram Vilas Paswan, Madhu Dandavate and S.R. Bommai

With former JD splinter groups like Lok Shakti, Samata Party and the BJD under one umbrella, there is now talk of reunification of the old Janata Dal

Fusion Pangs

The Janata Dal is facing yet another crisis. As if the mass exodus of people from the Dal to other parties was not enough, the splits have also been coming at regular intervals. And now, that seems to be the only way to keep alive a party facing extinction.

When the JD Political Affairs Committee (PAC) held its first meeting in Delhi, the mood was sombre. Jaipal Reddy had demanded that Karnataka chief minister J.H. Patel face disciplinary action for suggesting a tie-up with BJP allies. On his part, Patel flew down to Delhi and hosted a lunch for Samata Party leaders George Fernandes, Jaya Jaitly and Nitish Kumar at Karnataka Bhavan. Apart from Ram Vilas Paswan, who's also keen to tie up with the Samata in Bihar, no other JD leader was present.

At the very moment when Patel and Paswan were discussing the merits of

One faction in the Janata Dal wants a tie-up with the National Democratic Alliance. The other is vehemently opposed to it

Chinese cuisine over Indian with Fernandes, a sulking Deve Gowda was being placated by Amar Singh to join Mulayam Singh Yadav and Sharad Pawar's front.

The party was on the verge of a split.

At the meeting, Gowda sat next to party chief Sharad Yadav, and kept muttering in his ear. "Please do not ally with the BJP," he said in a loud whisper. Gowda's predicament was easy to under-

stand. While most of the others - including the party president himself - had something to gain by a statewide alliance with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), his group had everything to lose. All along, Gowda had been vociferous in his anti-BJP propaganda. How could he now merge with its allies?

Eleven PAC members agreed with Gowda's proposal and opposed a merger with the NDA. However, the pro-NDA group had a majority in the party's national executive. Sharad Yadav's view was that the state leaders should be allowed the freedom of entering into alliances at the state level. Patel and Paswan agreed, but went a step further. "Our fight has not been against communalism. We have always fought against corruption," Paswan had pointed out at the lunch at Karnataka Bhavan. "It was only because of the Babri Masjid demolition and V.P. Singh that we aligned with the secular parties. And what could be

more corrupt than a party which has aligned with Jayalalitha? And a party which supports Laloo Yadav," he had added.

Gowda's group does not agree with this. On his side are Jaipal Reddy, Madhu Dandavate, S.R. Bommai, C.M. Ibrahim and Srikant Jena. They meet regularly at Gowda's residence in Delhi. The other group holds its meetings at Karnataka Bhavan and this consists of the party president, the Karnataka chief minister, I.K. Gujral and Ram Vilas Paswan.

For his part, Gujral has already started his own communication channel with the BJP. Whether the party is ready to forget the fact that Gujral refused to cast his vote in favour of the Atal Behari Vajpayee government a few months ago, is

another matter. (In fact, Vajpayee himself had rung up Gujral and solicited his vote. Reddy had refused.)

In the meantime, the Congress was putting its own pressure on the Janata Dal. Arjun Singh, who was away in Madhya Pradesh, called Sharad Yadav on the eve of the PAC meeting and asked him not to take any hasty decision. But what Singh hopes to offer Yadav after doing a deal with his *bete noire* (the other Yadav from Bihar) is not clear. From all accounts, the JD president didn't give Singh's call much thought.

In Bihar, the Janata Dal has realised that in order to win against Laloo Yadav it needs to consolidate the anti-Laloo vote. Which is why Paswan — who very nearly pressed his buzzer in favour of



Sharad Yadav thinks that state leaders should be allowed the freedom of choosing their allies at the state level

the BJP on the floor of the House in April and was later patted on the back by Laloo when it was discovered that he had voted along with the secular forces — is so keen on a tie-up with the Samata Party.

In Orissa as well, the state unit has advocated a merger with Navin Patnaik's BJD. However, state leader Srikant Jena, who has always opposed Patnaik at the state level, opposed this. He pointed to the futility of reaping the anti-incumbency vote and agreed with Gowda in that the Dal should oppose the NDA.

In Karnataka, Patel has a greater problem on his hands. While Paswan is merely worried about his own seat, he has to worry about an entire state. Karnataka will be facing both the Assembly

Main Players In The Janata Dal Drama

J.H. Patel (Karnataka chief minister)

Stand: Initially, BJP was a 'curse' and 'cancer'. Changed his tune to "We cannot stick to our resolution of equidistance from the BJP and the Congress. The Telugu Desam Party and the National Conference are also part of the NDA and no chastity is lost by aligning with it"

Siddaramaiah (deputy chief minister of Karnataka)

Stand: "Lok Shakti can be part of the third front only if it severs all ties with the BJP"

Ramakrishna Hegde (Lok Shakti supremo)

Stand: "Cancer has a cure." Initiated and was instrumental in the tie-up with Patel

H.D. Deve Gowda (former Prime Minister)

Stand: Dead against Hegde's Lok Shakti. Claims to be with the 'secular' forces and continues to be pro-Congress

Sharad Yadav (Janata Dal president)

Stand: Contradicts himself. Says "We have asked Patel to shelve his proposal for an alliance with the NDA." Also claims that the JD Political Affairs Committee has asked Patel to 'broadbase' the Dal by bringing in splinter groups

Ananth Kumar (civil aviation minister)

Stand: "Patel cannot be part of the NDA at all"

B.S. Yeddyurappa (BJP state president)

Stand: Opposed to the induction of the J.H. Patel faction. "The BJP and Lok Shakti alone can win both the elections"

and Lok Sabha polls in September. And, unfortunately, the BJP is not too keen to take on an alliance partner that it has been criticising all along. In fact, civil aviation minister Ananth Kumar stressed this point when he met the Prime Minister in Delhi.

When Patel was asked about this, he retorted that he had only allied with the Samata and the Lok Shakti. If the BJP had a problem then it was upto Fernandes and Hegde to sort it out. He would not go to the BJP.

But he did. Just a day later, he sought an appointment with the Prime Minister and had a 45-minute meeting with him

It couldn't get worse for the ruling JD in Karnataka — the only state with a JD government. While the party has almost been wiped out elsewhere, it still can't keep its flock together

Last fortnight, the Janata Dal state unit sat for two days to decide on alliance partners for the Assembly and parliamentary elections. Patel and Siddaramaiah, deputy chief minister and the state Dal president, had declared after a detailed session with party members that the Janata Dal would be equidistant from the BJP and the Congress in the coming elections. Patel had declared that both these parties were a "curse and cancer". To drive home his point further, he told his supporters: "Instead of staying in a big house under somebody's obligations, it is always better to live in a small one with self-respect."

In less than 24 hours, Patel had changed his mind. At a breakfast meeting with old friend and Lok Shakti president Ramakrishna Hegde along with defence minister George Fernandes, Patel decided that a 'small house' wouldn't work — not for the parliamentary elections at least.

For the faction-ridden JD, a volte-face like this is nothing new. Besides, splits and mergers have been taking place with unfailing regularity. Discredited for a weak leadership and an inefficient government in Karnataka, the party has nothing to lose. "The Janata Dal has become insignificant," complains a Dal minister. "An alliance with any of the bigger parties will, at least, ensure survival for a few of the sitting MLAs."

Sources say that Sharad Yadav has been backing Patel on the alliance issue and the 'fence-sitting' is just part of 'public posturing'. "The battle is basically for who gets the symbol," explains a Patel-supporter.



Former PM Deve Gowda is opposed to the Dal allying with the NDA

With former JD splinter groups like Lok Shakti Samata Party and the BJD under one umbrella, there is now talk of reunification of the old Janata Dal. There is also talk of alignment and realignment of forces

Patel's entry into the NDA has wider ramifications. The inclusion of Patel and his troupe into the BJP-led NDA means a lot at the state level. An angry state BJP president, B.S. Yediyurappa, and Ananth Kumar said: Since the party is facing disintegration, Patel is trying to postpone the eventuality."

Factions within the BJP have already made their stand clear. Yediyurappa and Ananth Kumar have briefed Prime Minister Vajpayee extensively on the risks involved. "We have made our stand clear and the rest is for the Prime Minister to decide on what he thinks is best for the party," says Yediyurappa.

The inclusion of Patel means that the BJP will get targeted for the non-performance of the JD government.

Besides, the party is fighting a neck-and-neck contest with the Congress. Karnataka is a crucial state for two reasons. Firstly, with Assembly and parliamentary elections being held simultaneously, there is a lot at stake. And secondly, the BJP, after a disgraceful performance in Assembly elections in Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, is banking more on the southern states this time. The northern belt does not seem to hold much for the BJP. The added burden of a non-performing government in Karnataka also sets the odds against the party. The getting together of the present Janata Dal and its splinter groups may mean reliving some nostalgic moments of former glory, but not many within the BJP consider this 'wise'.

The Congress is quiet so far. And there is little that they can do right now. Whatever the case may be, the Karnataka elections promise the best in terms of theatrics and chaos. With the Janata Dal around, can all that be far behind? •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore and Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

Here are some questions to mull over in the aftermath of Operation Vijay

Beyond

INDIA HAS WON the Kargil war, its second successive victory after the Liberation of Bangladesh. The triumph on the scraggy pinnacles of Kargil is militarily more outstanding than the capture of Dhaka. Liberating Kargil, the *jawans* were fighting an extraordinarily well-prepared, equipped and motivated Pakistan Army at a time and at a place of its choosing ironically on our territory. The war started with both the balance of initiative and military advantage weighted heavily in Pakistan's favour.

The size and scale of aggression, whose contours were neither fully deciphered nor understood, had the Indian Army initially groping. Unfortunately for Pakistan, it could not pull through a grand commando operation. For Kargil was a mountain too far and the recharged Indian Army by then, unstoppable.

The immediate agenda after Kargil is to place the military and diplomatic victory in perspective and focus on the achievements of the *jawan*. It is time to reassure him he is neither expendable nor disposable. Why can't nation salute its soldier when he is alive, not just when he is dead?

But instead the knives are out accompanying the witch-hunting spree. In the name of accountability one should be

wary of falling into the who-is-to-blame trap right now. This will sour and sully a hard-earned victory. Of course, there is need for a White Paper on Beyond Kargil ensuring the sanctity of the LoC and lessons from the war. As part of its after-action report, the army has already started an enquiry on failure to detect the intrusions in time. In the aftermath of Kargil, here are 20 questions to mull over.

Q: What are the immediate tasks for the military in Kargil?

A: Once the intrusions are sanitised, the 27-year-old gaps between defences in Kargil have to be plugged — by surveillance and occupation. This does not imply establishing a string of posts but blocking routes of infiltration and preventing encroachment. The glaciated areas and those that are snow-bound in winter are to be kept under air and ground surveillance. Early warning radars and other technology aids for detection, yet to be tested for these altitudes, if operable can be deployed.

There is absolutely no difficulty in selecting a new grid of posts closing the existing gaps. However, three doubts remain in people's mind. That Kargil is Siachen, a large high-altitude force will be required and it will cost Rs 10-15 crore a day. All these are unfounded exaggerations. The only doubt is about certain posts that will have to be vacated in winter. The rules

Indian soldiers training their gun at the enemy positions



Kargil

on vacation of posts have been changing over the years. Our holding additional posts will force Pakistan to do the same on its side. It will also stimulate the development and economy of Kargil. The additional deployment will be no more than three to four extra infantry units, not brigades as mentioned.

Q: What about action outside Kargil?

A: Security of the LoC apart, the preventive deployment of the armed forces — which has acted as a strategic weight against Pakistan — along the rest of the LoC and international border should continue till winter and elections. This will

Kargil has highlighted the grave deficiencies in the management of defence funding through taking risks in depressed allocations in favour of populist measures

deter Pakistan from indulging in proxy-war and raising the ante in insurgency in the Valley later this year. A comprehensive counter-insurgency campaign to root out guest militants and local accomplices is overdue. Indian strategy should force Pakistan into respecting LoC by raising political, diplomatic and military costs of repeating Kargil.

Q: Is the *jawan* armed and equipped to fight along the LoC?

A: The state of defence preparedness is related to actual and potential capacity of the adversary. The victory in Kargil has conclusively proven no conspicuous shortcoming. At the same time, more sophisticated equipment would have reduced time and casualties to some extent. In the high mountains, the man-machine mix is weighted on the side of a fitter, agile and motivated soldier. Technology is a force multiplier, unlike in the plains where it is a battle-winner.

Unfair comparisons have been made with the state-of-the-art weapons and equipment used to selectively arm 2,000 Pak soldiers holding the Kargil heights. No army can immediately respond to such a situation unless contingency plans have addressed such aberrations on the LoC. A large-scale breach of LoC and the rush of troops to Kargil were both unexpected. Therefore, high-altitude equipment had to be ordered or bought off the shelf after the war started.

The long-standing demands for Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) equipment and upgrading the armoury of the *jawan* have moved woefully slow. The DRDO is culpable for this. Military equipment goes through tortuous acquisition procedures before materialising. These were waived during Kargil. The lesson is not only in modernising equipment but also streamlining systems. Op Readiness is an 'around the clock' and 'calendar military necessity'.

Indian troops atop Tololing Ridge





Although Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has, as before the war, emerged the strongest node of power in Pakistan, the army, the ISI and fundamentalist groups continue to call some of the shots. Nawaz Sharif was unable to deescalate the war sooner than he did because of the vested interests of each of these groups...

Q: Was the war a consequence of a declining defence budget?

A: Many experts would agree with this formulation and also attribute to it the dilution of conventional military deterrence which encouraged Pakistan to do a Kargil. This sequential view is only partly tenable as neglect in defence allocation is a decade-old phenomenon. The anomalies in the budgeting and expenditure systems are endemic.

Kargil has highlighted the grave deficiencies in the management of defence funding through taking risks in depressed allocations in favour of populist measures. Every finance minister has poetry in his budget speech but there is no poetic justice in the one-liner "additional needs of defence will be met if required."

Q: How effective has been the higher management of war?

A: The higher direction of war by a caretaker government and its interface with military high command have been commendable. All this despite a warped higher defence organisation, wonky National Security Council (NSC), an ill-fitting intelligence apparatus and not the best of civil-military relations. The unwieldy military machine spearheaded by a lumbrous army lost valuable time revving up.

But then it delivered. The credit for this must go to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee heading the Cabinet Committee on Security which met regularly, at times every day. It gave the armed forces a simple unencumbered task: to evict the armed intruders without crossing the LoC. There was no political interference and pressure of time on the conduct of battle which was left to the service chiefs headed by the Chief of Army Staff who is also Chairman Chief of Staff Committee. Even in hindsight, the decision not to cross the LOC was wise.



Q: How serious are charges of subversion by the natives of Kargil and rest of J&K?

A: This is a serious risk India has lived with for long. It has resisted acting against suspects or traitors for political reasons. The latest infiltration of the BSF camp in Bandipora is an example. But the most disturbing incident occurred in early June in Turtuk. At least, one dozen Pakistan infiltrators with 30 weapons were ambushed near Turtuk. They were part of a plan to turn the Siachen defences and recapture territory lost in 1971 to the Tiger of Turtuk, Col Rinchen, MVC and bar.

Four villages in Turtuk — all Balti Muslims — were implicated in this operation. Despite army insistence on their removal from the sensitive border area, only 11 families were deported. There are other tales of sabotage and subversion from Kargil. It is time to decide what is more important. Defence of suspects or defence of LoC.

Q: How useful was the information war?

A: Like ground combat, this also took time picking up. This was fought by different agencies and at different levels. The predominant theme was Pakistan's betrayal of India and the latter's righteous cause in launching the military riposte. But the role of Indian media and public mood and support were the force multipliers which defeated Pakistan info-war based on denials. The army had set up a special cell for its info and psywar.

Atal Behari Vajpayee was its prime practitioner. He claimed *vijay* on 10 July even before Pakistan announced withdrawals he had pre-empted both Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Bill Clinton from taking credit for it. He suggested the withdrawals were forced by military victory not US diplomacy.

Army convoy carrying reinforcements to Dras



Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee claimed *vijay* on 10 July. And even before Pakistan announced withdrawals, he had pre-empted both Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Bill Clinton from taking credit for it. He suggested the withdrawals were forced by military victory not US diplomacy

Q: Was the war politicised?

A: An attempt was made by the Opposition parties to separate the government from the army so that it could attack the former without hurting the latter. This was resented by the military who said: we take orders from the government. Any distinction between the two would have spread confusion in the ranks. The politicisation of the war has started in the run up to the elections. This will inevitably sully the image of the armed forces and hurt the *jawan*.

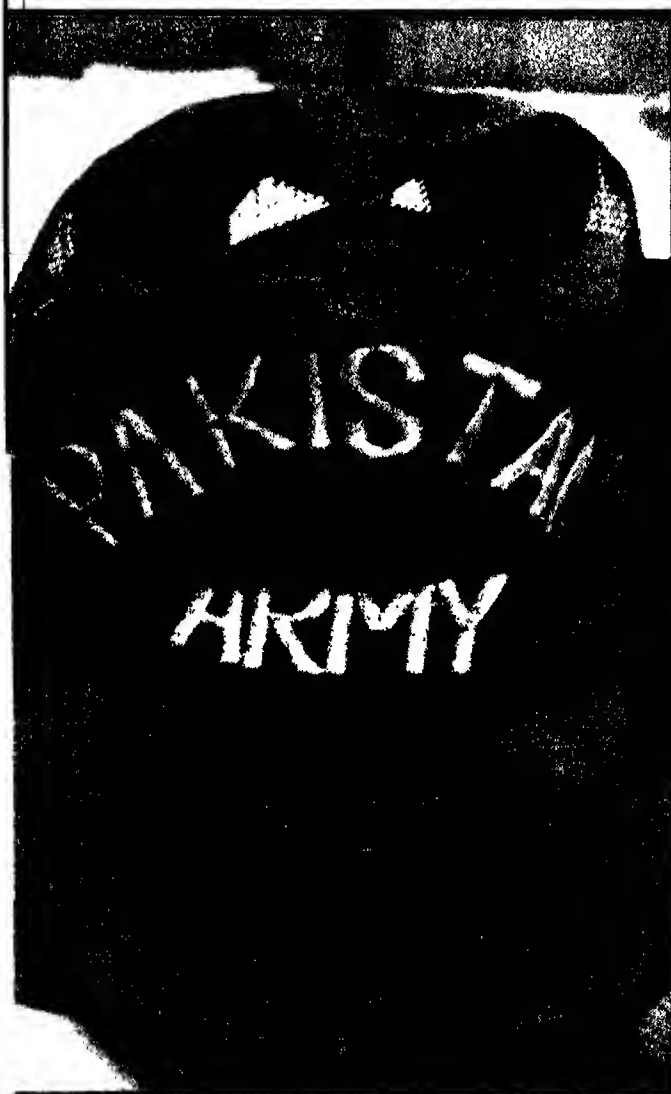
Q: What has been the role of diplomacy?

A: Winning the other war; isolating Pakistan internationally, and winning over Pakistan's traditional all-weather ally China and strategic partner USA on Kargil. It won for India the rest of the war after Tiger Hill without fighting it.

Q: What is the cost of the war?

A: There is no definitive cost estimate as yet. The figures which have been bandied about range from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 250 crore to Rs 10-15 crore per day of the war. The main items are war losses, new equipment, transportation cost, aviation, air and artillery costs, compensation for casualties and

A cap abandoned by a Pak soldier



now, the new costs for defending Kargil. SUNDAY's most liberal estimate is less than Rs 1,000 crore. But a reported Kargil cess of Rs 5,000 crore would be cashing in on the Kargil mood.

Q: What was Pakistan's gameplan in Kargil?

A: The plan was not as grandiose or complicated as announced by the United Jihad Council but rather simply to cut off the Leh road and turn the Siachen defences the bottomline being

After Tiger Hill fell on 4 July, the decline in Pakistan Army started. The choice became clear — between military defeat and withdrawal. The Northern Light Infantry chose to retreat. Pakistan however played the charade of appealing to the Mujahideen to withdraw. Had they not, their defences would have been overrun, latest by 20 July



Uniform of a Pak soldier retrieved from Kargil

to internationalise Kashmir. The intrusion plan was brilliant, its execution less impressive, but failing to factor its international repercussion and India's response was the fatal flaw. Pakistan could not afford to fight a war.

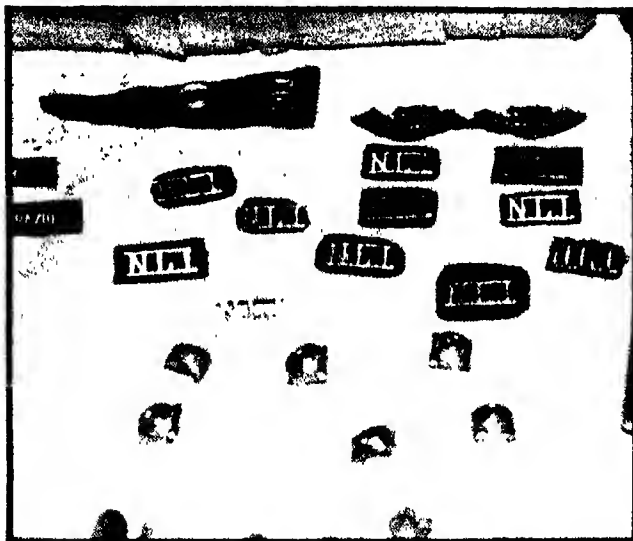
Q: What were the military shortcomings?

A: Their preparations were not as sound as made out to be. Pakistan failed to exploit the wide gap north of Chorbatla, south of Turtuk now renamed as Hanif sector. This is puzzling

because it is the key to Siachen.

Q: Why did the Pakistan plan fail?

A: A series of miscalculations; about cutting the Leh road, carrying through the Mujahideen mask on their regular army, strong Indian military reaction, which included air strikes and international condemnation. These failures locked Pakistan in issuing convoluted denials: regular troops not involved, LoC not crossed, dead bodies not Pakistanis and therefore not for theirs to accept ... etc. Once their defences started crum-



Buttons and badges retrieved from the dead Pakistani Army personnel



Pay books of Pak soldiers recovered from the war zone

bling, so did the morale and willingness to fight. The news for the appeal for withdrawal created panic.

Q: What is the internal power play after the war in Pakistan?

A: Although Nawaz Sharif has, as before the war, emerged the strongest node of power in Pakistan, the army, the ISI and fundamentalist groups continue to call some of the shots. Nawaz Sharif was unable to deescalate the war sooner than he did because of the vested interests of each of these groups.

Eventually, when groups from within the establishment got together a majority view was culled. At present, publicly only the Islamic fundamentalists have opposed the withdrawal from Kargil.

Q: Why was the Northern Light Infantry (NLI) regiment singled out by Pakistan for this war?

A: For reasons of secrecy and limiting move of troops into Gilgit-Skardu. None were inducted from outside the Northern Areas, which according to a court ruling is not part of Pakistan but undivided J&K. The NLI single-handedly bore the brunt of fighting and suffered 700 killed and 1,200 wounded. The question being asked is why one single regiment from a remote area was made the sacrificial goat.

Q: Had there been no withdrawal, how long would the war have gone on?

A: After Tiger Hill fell on 4 July, the decline in Pakistan Army started. The choice became clear — between military defeat and withdrawal. NLI chose to retreat. Pakistan however played the charade of appealing to the Mujahideen to withdraw. Had they not, their defences would have been overrun within 10 to 15 days, latest by 20 July.

Q: Has nuclear deterrence worked in preventing all-out war?

A: Yes, but thanks to Pakistan, Kargil has lent credence to the 10-year-old Western view that Kashmir is a nuclear flash-point. This is Pakistan's negative gain which it will live to regret. Nuclear deterrence will not work at subconventional/limited war level. A positive fallout from Kargil is a better perception on each side of the other's military threshold.

Q: Why were the casualties so high?

A: The attacker, especially in mountains is at a disadvantage against the defender. Artillery has accounted for nearly 80 per cent of casualties on both sides. Pakistan gunners have shown greater accuracy due to their gun locating radar which India does not have. The delay in bringing down from heights to bases, the wounded, has led to many deaths. Had India had a fleet of high altitude helicopters and some helipads in the war zone, casualty evacuation would have been more responsive and many lives saved. The figure of 395 killed, may have been reduced by one-third.

Q: What is left of Indo-Pak relations?

A: They are in tatters. Mutual suspicion and distrust have eroded CBMs painfully developed over the years. Probably the biggest blow is at the military level. For once, the Indian soldier will really loathe his Pakistani counterpart. But the door to the Lahore process will not be closed.

Q: What are the lessons from Kargil?

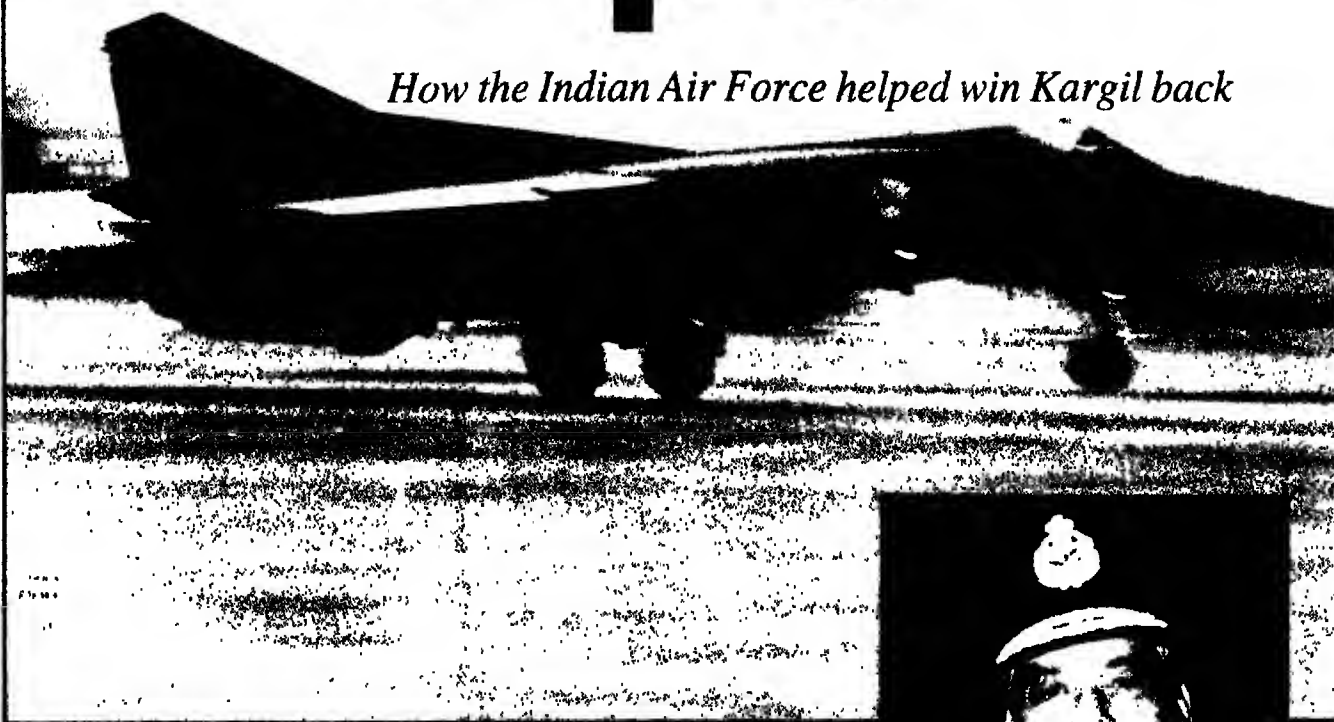
A: What stands out most is the raw courage of soldiers and the outstanding leadership of young officers. The main lesson is in the perils of lowering Operational Readiness. The need for modernising intelligence, military equipment and a proper force balance for LIC has been highlighted. Kargil has underscored jointmanship.

A Kashmir policy must be invented, supported by an operational doctrine that will persuade Pakistan to respect sanctity of LoC. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

Top Guns

How the Indian Air Force helped win Kargil back



WHERE EAGLES DARE: A Mig-23 prepares to take off for a mission

On 25 May when Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee gave the green signal for air strikes in Kargil, little did the pilots know what was in store. No air force in the world had ever carried out operations at heights above 16,000 feet. No aircraft has been designed for terrain like Kargil's. No exercises had been conducted by the Indian Air Force (IAF) in this area. It was definitely not the place the air force had been expecting to conduct operations in case of war.

Except for a few Cheetah helicopters which conducted air reconnaissance or transported senior army officials to the area, rarely was a sortie planned in this sector. And suddenly on 25 May, air strikes codenamed Operation Safed Sagar were ordered. The air force pressed into action its MiG-21s and 23s. It improvised the Mi-17 helicopter, armed it with machine guns, called it a gunship and flew it close to target the intruders. But after the IAF lost two aircraft and a

Mi-17 with its crew, it realised it needed a review of strategies.

Recalling the initial days of action, the AOC-in-C, Western Air Command (WAC), Air Marshal Vinod Patney told SUNDAY, "I didn't want to risk my pilots any further. In a terrain like this (Kargil), tangible gains are difficult to come by and losing resources without gains isn't good strategic thinking." So after the first few days, the air force started what Air Marshal Patney termed 'cost-benefit



BRASS TALK: Air Chief Marshal A.Y. Tipnis said the Pakistani F-16s were twice barely 15 km away from Indian aircraft

The Mirage aircraft was the mainstay for precision attacks using thousand pound bombs fitted with a laser kit. This was an improvisation to cut cost. In addition, the IAF used the Jaguars along with the MiG-25s for reconnaissance

operations'.

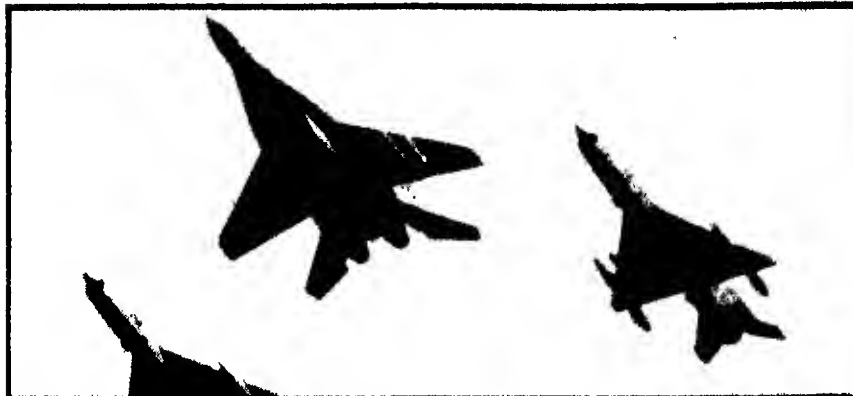
The air force flew about 6,500 sorties in the whole operation. Twelve hundred of these were done by fighters, of which 550 were strike sorties. At an average, 10 to 11 strike missions took off in a day. The remaining 650 sorties were undertaken for reconnaissance and air-defence purposes.

About half of the total sorties were used for transporting goods to the front. A senior IAF official disclosed that the

many as 925 flying hours.

Since the maximum area of penetration was 10 to 12 kilometres, it was impossible to carry out strikes while flying towards the LoC. Most of the fighters have a turning radii of around six to eight kilometres. Obviously, there was no way the aircraft could operate without violating India's USP on the diplomatic front, the LoC.

To avoid this, fighters had to fly paral-



LORD OF THE SKIES: A MiG-29 flanked by Mirage-2000 flying over the Batalik sector

air force airlifted 6,500 tonnes of load including ammunition, food, drinking water and other logistic requirements. As many as 30,000 personnel were transported in the form of casualties or fresh reinforcements by the air force. The choppers also played a crucial role in transportation. In fact they exhausted as

much as the LoC. While this ensured that terms of reference laid by the government weren't violated, it made spotting of targets even more difficult. "The operations had to be conducted within a narrow corridor between the LoC and the point till where the intruders had entered. Targets were hardly visible from the

aircraft, one of our reconnaissance parties used a 'handycam' to record pictures and when we saw them later on ground, we found small dots which were actually the targets," said Air Marshal Patney.

After a few days, the air force took a conscious decision to concentrate only on cutting off enemy supply camps and leave the attack on intruders to the army. One of the characteristics of the whole operation was combined planning between the air force and the army. And Air Marshal Patney went to the extent of saying, "There was hardly any target captured by the army which wasn't visited by the air force earlier."

This may be an exaggeration as the IAF struck all of 25 targets, six of which were effective strikes. Nevertheless, air-strikes with laser improvised bombs along the Sando Nala in Mushkoh blocked the supplies reaching Tiger Hills and other important areas in the Dias sector. Similarly, the repeated strikes on Munthodhallo virtually strangled Jubar and Dog Hills in the Batalik region. Munthodhallo may well become the IAF's battle honour.

After the first week, IAF was cautious. It flew at heights above 30,000 feet as the Stinger missiles couldn't reach beyond 28,000 feet. The Mirage, which entered on 7 June was the mainstay for precision attacks using thousand pound bombs fitted with a laser kit. This was an improvisation to cut cost. In addition, the Jaguars along with the MiG-25s were used for reconnaissance.

The Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal A. Y. Tipnis has gone on record stating the Pakistani F-16s were on two occasions barely 15 km away from Indian aircraft. Quoting this, a senior officer said, "Our surveillance was flawless. Some of our reconnaissance pictures were so clear at times that even the army used it as inputs before launching an assault."

While the cost of an operations is yet to be established, according to Air Marshal Patney only 25 per cent of the total strike force of the WAC was used in the operations. "Let the enemy know the WAC is capable of much more," he added.

One clear lesson from Kargil is the need for a versatile combat helicopter that can be used at altitudes upto 22,000 feet. There is also the requirement to transfer the utility and attack choppers presently with the air force to army aviation, a demand which is outstanding. •

Pranab Dhal Samanta/New Delhi

Plane Account

The IAF says the air operations were cost-effective

The key phrase of the IAF, after the Kargil operations, has been 'the air operations were cost-effective'. According to a senior air force officer, "The number of sorties we did was not more than what we do during peace time." In fact, another senior officer said: "The war was good training for our pilots."

Explaining the cost of the air war, an IAF spokesperson said: "If you deduct the training cost from the overall cost of the war, the only expenditure is the cost of ammunition." But there were reports that the air force used laser-guided bombs which cost Rs 1 crore each.

However, the IAF has clarified that it used a laser kit which was attached to a thousand pound bomb. These kits were imported from the US in the early 90s. Each of these cost \$ 17,000 (approximately, Rs 7 lakh). Since the thousand pound is indigenously produced and their production was not increased during the operations, the only cost was of the kit.

Reliable sources indicate, the IAF used 10 to 11 of these bombs — which means a total cost of 70 lakhs. However, there might have been excesses in the number of transport sorties but the spokesperson says, 'It was well within the budget.' •

President K.R. Narayanan's reported suggestion to the Vajpayee government to put in abeyance its recent decision to shift the crisis-ridden telecom industry from a "licence-based regime" to a "revenue-sharing" arrangement has raised fundamental questions about the limits of freedom of a caretaker government.

By choosing to intervene in matters of telecom, President Narayanan has exposed himself to charges of ambivalence and selectivity. He allowed full freedom to the Bharatiya Janata Party government to deal with the Kargil crisis that included giving safe passage to Pakistani intruders, lifting the ban on the contentious Bofors gun and also approving the purchase of the T-90 main battle tank.

But when it came to the Vajpayee government's endeavour to rescue the telecom sector — whose survival is crucial to the country emerging as an industrial power — Narayanan reportedly chose to pull the plug. By doing that he also gave credence to rumours that there was mala fide in the manner in which the whole issue was rushed through by the Prime Minister's Office.

There are also suggestions that the Election Commission's decision to advance the date of notification of the mid-term polls by almost ten days may have something to do with gentle exertions from Rashtrapati Bhavan that did not want the Vajpayee government to take any more policy decisions.

The gravamen of the President's decision would have far-reaching implications for the economy. He is hinting at the Rs 1,400-crore write-off that would accrue to telecom companies after the six-month shift in effective date for the payment of arrears.

"This is hardly a bonanza. This is the least the government could have given us for all the delays that the sector has experienced in the last few years," claims Virat Bhatia of the US telecom giant, AT&T.

Industry sources are willing to give the benefit of the doubt to President Narayanan. They claim that he just chose to bank on the wrong brief. It may be recalled that the President summoned urban development minister Jagmohan — who was unceremoniously shifted from the communication ministry — to explain to him about the implications of the shift towards the revenue-sharing regime.

Wrong number

The New Telecom Policy runs into trouble



By intervening in telecom affairs, President Narayanan has exposed himself to charges of ambivalence and selectivity. The move has raised questions about the limits of freedom of a caretaker government

Jagmohan, it may be recalled, had made it very sticky for the private telecom operators and insisted on the payment of 20 per cent of licence fees, which they had not paid for a plethora of reasons. Jagmohan, private operators insist, was being unreasonable. Basing himself on the advice of the department of telecommunications, he ignored the grievance of the private operators that their failure to pay the licence fees was due to inordinate delays in statutory clearances by the government departments.

The net outcome of the delays in the telecom sector is making the companies "bleed heavily". Telecom sources claim that the carry forward loss in this sector is in the vicinity of Rs 8,000 crore. If the government, in their view, had not announced the package (at the time it did) then these companies would not have any other option but to get out.

"Even after the transition, there are a number of telecom companies willing to short sell their licence and stock and get out," asserted a corporate source. In his view, if the decision had been delayed till the new government was in place — that is in October — then most of the companies would have been in dire straits. Till now six private operators have had to surrender their licences for non-payment of licence fees.

The moot question is, could the government and the economy afford the collapse of the liberalisation programme in this vital sector? The President, evidently, did not have the benefit of this vital input.

The transition from "licence-based" to "revenue-sharing" was mooted under the New Telecom Policy 1999 (NTP '99). The same was articulated in the draft discussion paper of the Prime Minister's Group on Telecom which believed that "the project cost has been excessively high on account of licence fees and project sponsors have been unable to take up even a part of this external fund commitments... There if the licence fee component is removed a major part of the project expenditure would be met by the present level of equity commitments".

The BJP government claims that the latest move is merely an elaboration of the intent that had been expressed earlier and therefore it was not a new policy.

The 6 July Cabinet decision envisages

- Existing basic and cellular licence holders will migrate to revenue-sharing formula from 1 August;

- The tenure of licence for cellular operators has been increased from ten to 20 years;

- All licence fee arrears that had touched Rs 3,700 crore on 30 April up to 31 July this year will have to be paid. The operators will have to pay 15 per cent by 15 August and offer bank guarantees for the rest of the amount payable by the end of the year;

- Cellular and basic service providers will have to agree to shift to the new regime;

- The telecom companies had to agree

- The cellular contracts were based on GSM mobility and basic based on voice telephony. Today GSM is threatened globally by wireless loop limited mobility and voice on Internet. Proving thereby that the licences were not technology-proof.

- Licences were bid for a certain protection in the market place involving duopoly in both cellular and basic services. NTP '99 has opened the market to wider competition that would further bring down the market share and revenue.

- There have been delays of all kinds. A Telecom Commission-sponsored study



Jagmohan had made it very sticky for the private telecom operators and insisted on the payment of 20 per cent of licence fees, which they had not paid

to the new telecom-sharing regime and agreed to pay up their arrears. The government in turn promised to drop all court cases pertaining to the recovery of licence fees.

The genesis of the problem probably lies in the manner in which the scamtainted former communication minister, Sukh Ram, went about the business of liberalising the telecom sector.

When he chose to open both the basic and cellular telephony to the private sector, there was a belief among the major corporates that they would make an easy killing. Their hopes were premised on

by the BICP found delays to the tune of one year by 1997 alone.

- The government and the operators had overestimated the consumers' ability to pay for cellular services. The bid document had stated Rs 16 per minute as the air-time tariff. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India in its tariff order found that the price had to be capped at Rs 6 per minute if the spread of the cellular telephony had to be deepened and extended.

From the private operators' point of view, these were reasons enough to renegotiate the entire deal. But DoT and Jag-



Sukh Ram: opened up the telecom sector

mohan were not convinced about it. Telecom majors also allege that the former communication minister was not applying misgivings about the private sector equally. They claim that Srinivas Telecom that bought the licence for the Tamil Nadu circle was given relief on specious grounds of FIPB delay. Interestingly, this delay is not service impacting.

When angry operators raised this issue they were told that the department had allowed Srinivas Telecom more time after getting advice from attorney-general Soli Sorabjee. Corporate sources claim that more than 70 letters from other operators were lying with the minister and DoT but they were not sent for reference to the AG.

These sources charge the ministry with showing special favours to Fascel, a consortium comprising the Hinduja, Shinwatra and the controversial Himachal Futuristic. Not too long back, the finance minister's former adviser, Mohan Guruswamy, had hinted at the clout the Hinduja had over the government.

The telecom issue has been exacerbated by the progressive emasculation of TRAI by DoT.

If TRAI had been allowed to discharge its full responsibility as a "manager of competition" and "adjudicator", then Rashtrapati Bhavan, too, would not have nursed doubts about the motives of the caretaker government. If the deci-

sion was perceived to be "bad in law" then a regulatory authority could have intervened.

But TRAI is a bound creature. A creation of Parliament, it has been dragged by the DoT on the fundamental issue — on what constitutes its jurisdiction. Through an ordinance, TRAI, instead of being an "adjudicator" has been reduced to being an "arbitrator".

Devaluation of TRAI has eroded investor confidence. Their misery is deep.

Soli Sorabjee: advised the government to grant more time



pened by the fact that DoT, too, is a competitor and it can safely swallow all those telecom circles from where private licencees have been ejected due to defaulting on licence fee payment. "DoT controls the Rs 26,000 crore telecom market and even then it refuses to provide space to the private sector," claimed an industry source.

It is because of these reasons that the recent move of the government to open domestic long distance calls (DLD) — a money-spinning proposition — to the private sector has evoked an indifferent response. No known player has bid for the Internet service, too, after it was opened up for the private sector. "No one feels protected," stated an industry source.

A corporate source wondered why the telecom multinationals are faring so badly in India. According to him, companies like the AT&T, BT, Swisscom, US West have built their reputation on technical excellence and acquitted themselves honourably in terms of performance but in India they seem to be totally at sea.

One of the major factors behind the difficult passage to these transnational companies is the suspicion that the ruling establishment harbours towards them. This distrust and antagonism towards foreign capital — before Manmohan Singh opened the doors of the economy — allowed an entrenched vested interest to earn unreasonable profits. This vested interest skewed economic policies to its advantage making it virtually impossible for the entry of foreign investment and technology. The same mindset prevails even now.

Since 1991, there may have been a sea change in the communication landscape of the country but the beneficiaries of the earlier regime refuse to give up. Their endeavour revealed through the activism of DoT, has been to somehow gain control over the defaulting telecom companies who would like to cut their losses and get out.

Once these circles are in control of the DoT, they would be handed over to crony capitalists who in turn can keep both politics and politicians greased. Is it any surprising that a group of industrial houses was lobbying hard against migration from a licence-based regime. The fact that it failed to stop the government from going ahead with these changes is an eloquent testimony of shifting paradigms. •

Sanjay Kapoor/New Delhi

Talking through

Bangalore outshines other metros in hosting Question Time India



Question Time India has gone off the BBC channel for a sabbatical until August. And think that until it started travelling outside Delhi, it fell into the usual Delhi trap of poli-

tics and politicians in the majority, just like the programmes by Rajat Sharma, Karan Thapar, *Aap Ki Adalat* and dozens of others. It was a question of reshuffling the same old politicians, giving the same old answers. Throwing in an occasional Kiran Bedi, Shobha De, Amjad Ali Khan or Manisha Koirala still left the politicians in such a vast majority that it hardly made a difference.

So, after a long run in Delhi, *Question Time India* started moving out and in the process, showed the true and different characters of the three cities it visited as well as the fact that Delhi is not India.

First it was Bombay, sorry Mumbai. It used to hold the pride of place in India as far as civic affairs went, with legendary people like Pherozeshah Mehta heading its municipal corporation and matched by citizens who set an example in civic sense, tolerance and in having an open house for people from other parts of India. And yet people left you alone if you wanted. A city of opportunity and big dreams. Well, with a bureaucrat and a civic official on the panel, almost the entire discussion centred round the sad state of the city. The programme came alive with documented criticism which had the bureaucrat cornered. There were positive proposals for improvement and a burning pride in the city which was touching

Next it was Calcutta. The venue was Science City, which is the envy of the rest of India. But with Mamata Banerjee and a West Bengal minister on the panel, we had to have political fireworks. It became something like a Delhi panel and since Ms Banerjee can never stop behaving as if she is addressing a crowd of lakhs on the Maidan, even on TV, it quite frequently became a shouting



Since Mamata Banerjee can never stop behaving as if she is addressing a crowd of lakhs on the Maidan, the Calcutta show quite frequently became a shouting match

match made all the more rowdy because Rituparno Ghosh was so timid as to be almost inaudible. However, the endearing and typically Calcutta touch came when the recording was postponed for two hours so that the panellists and audience could watch the Indo-Pak World Cup match on TV. And since the minister, like all ministers, was late, a good

time was had by all.

And then it was the turn of Bangalore, one of the most beautiful, civilised cities in India and now its Silicon Valley. The panel was a heady mix of hi-tech, culture and the inevitable hapless bureaucrat. It was one of the liveliest discussions, with the right balance between hi-tech, culture and the sad state of the city. People spoke in comparatively gentler tones. The audience had all kinds of interests — environmentalists, women activists, cultural people and retired people who showed the kind of wisdom which, unlike it happens in some other cities we know, were listened to with respect. So if the citizens of Mumbai showed burning pride in their city, the citizens of Bangalore showed a highly intelligent interest as well as passionate pride. The bureaucrat on the panel, if possible, squirmed even more than Bombay's.

That does not often happen in Delhi, does it? •

More hurdles

Bhaichung Bhutia now needs a work permit to play in England

The sprightly striker seems determined to launch into an international career, but some jinx seems to thwart his plans always. Bhaichung Bhutia, the highest-paid footballer in India, is now working out at Fulham FC hoping to become the second Indian to play in the English league, after Masood Faqri in the distant past.

Bhaichung had set out in January to try his luck with Aston Villa, but he did not get beyond the team-practice stage before the English Premier Division side decided it needed a defender, not a striker. Thereafter, negotiations were conducted with several European clubs, until Fulham evinced interest.

Eager to get a footing on foreign soil, the Indian Football Association and the All India Football Federation rushed through the mandatory clearance neces-

sary for an Indian to play for a foreign club. They didn't realise that it was not a transfer clearance but merely permission to play abroad temporarily that was asked for. It was essentially a "no objection" certificate the Football Association of England had requested for.

But Bhaichung's problems didn't end there. It now transpires that the player needs a work permit in England in order to just play a friendly match for Fulham! Normally, the well-organised pre-season warm-up matches are exploratory exercises, where the regulars and the hopefuls are introduced together to see which combination of players is the best.

Unfortunately for Bhaichung, Fulham has scheduled some games for which spectators are charged entrance fees. Such matches attract the regular provisions which include eligibility

criteria like the work permit for players.

This presents a catch-22 situation for the 25-year-old Indian. Unless he gets a work permit from any European Union country he cannot play. And he will not be issued that until he has a contract with a club.

Fulham has not decided on his future as yet. The club would like to see how he fares in match situations, his temperament and his understanding with other members of the team during a game before offering him a contract.

Fulham want to see him in action in at least two matches before a final assessment. How this will be achieved is a question that must be worrying Bhaichung. If there are friendlies where gate money is not charged, Bhutia might get a look in. Or, if the FA seeks a temporary permit to cover just two matches. Either way, it's a tough situation, with the uncertainty becoming an additional worry.

But Bhutia's agent, P.C. Raj Purohit, hopes a solution will be found soon. He also feels Bhaichung has a good chance of bagging a contract. The Sikkimese youngster has talent to go along with an ideal temperament. He is mentally tough and is willing to work hard.

All sections of football lovers will welcome Bhaichung's success, despite the fact that it would deprive Calcutta of some great soccer moments. After all, an Indian's success abroad is so rare that even playing for a First Division (which is below the Premier Division) club will be cause for cheer.

More important, if this ambitious footballer gets into an equally ambitious club — Fulham has steadily risen through the lower divisions with training from stalwarts like Bobby Charlton and, more recently, Kevin Keegan — he will encourage several youngsters to try their luck abroad.

With an agent as enterprising as Raj Purohit, it may not be long before more Bhaichungs start exploring the European circuit, which encourages foreigners in their ranks. There are more than 30 Nigerians on this circuit. Even a trickle of Indians will give a big boost to football here. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta

Bhaichung Bhutia: Jinxed success



UTTAR PRADESH

Power to the people

Kalyan Singh unleashes his decentralisation drive

RAJESH KUMAR



PERFECT TIMING: chief minister Kalyan Singh

Decentralisation seems to be the buzzword in Lucknow these days, thanks to Uttar Pradesh chief minister Kalyan Singh's much-touted stress on taking power to the grass roots. "Tomorrow I may not be occupying this chair. But I am sure I will always be remembered for transfer of power to the grass-roots level," Kalyan told a large gathering at Bakshi-ka-Talab, a Lucknow suburb, while launching his decentralisation programme. In his hour-and-a-half-long emotional speech, the CM hastened to add, "In fact, people will remember me for two things — for demolition of the disputed shrine in Ayodhya and for bringing panchayat raj to the state."

No doubt Kalyan's decentralisation formula is derived from the panchayat model conceived by Mahatma Gandhi. But the UP chief minister wants to drive home the point that he had indeed created history.

Kalyan is confident that a systematic implementation of the process will bring him rich dividends. The CM knows that the

real impact of his programme will be felt after two to three years. But he would like to describe his initiative as a "much desired step to transform the entire face of Uttar Pradesh."

Sure enough, what Kalyan has in mind are the success stories of veterans like Jyoti Basu or that of newer faces like Digvijay Singh, both of whom are his sworn political rivals. The UP chief minister flatly denies being influenced by the two. "The thought was enshrined in the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi," he is quick to point out, though not without adding Jana Sangh stalwart Deen Dayal Upadhyay's contribution. "Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay too believed in entrusting power to the lowest rung," he claims.

At the centre of the programme lies the slogan: *Satta janata ke haath, sarkar janata ke dwar* (Power in the hands of the people and government at the people's doorstep). Kalyan is believed to have coined the slogan himself.

Efforts in this direction began a couple of months back, with the task being entrusted to Dilip Kotia, a close aide and a

development-oriented IAS officer. Kotia has a passion for bringing about the desired changes in the system to make it more accountable and responsive to the masses. "Gone are the days when one could run the administration over an alien population from one's ivory tower," Kotia points out.

Where Kalyan perhaps has managed to move a step ahead of his counterparts is in establishing direct contact with each of the *gram pradhans* (village heads) spread across the sprawling state. This was done through two letters — one sent across in March and the next in May — apprising them of his plan to entrust them with powers that they had perhaps never dreamt of having.

The plan involves handing over the power to run primary, upper-primary and non-formal schools at the village level where *pradhans* will have the authority to hire and fire teachers. Government grants for building schools and their maintenance will also reach the panchayats directly from the government.

Health is another area where Kalyan's decentralisation plan will have an impact. Family welfare centres will henceforth be run by the *gram* panchayats which will appoint its own health workers. Likewise, allotment of fair price shops for essential commodities will be made by panchayats which have also been entrusted with the local handling of agriculture, animal husbandry and other activities related to rural development.

"We are the first state in the country to have allocated four per cent of the state's tax revenue to be transferred directly to the *gram* panchayats," reveals the CM. "As it stands, Rs 1,100 crores will be transferred directly to the *gram* panchayats during the financial year 1999-2000," he adds.

The system, however, is not without its checks and balances. "Unlike many other states, we have not given blanket power to individuals. There are separate committees for development work, for education and for public interest in general."

Much of the government work at the state headquarters in Lucknow is set to move out to districts where the magistrate has been delegated financial powers to issue grants to *gram* panchayats. However, unlike Madhya Pradesh, where the district magistrate continues to function as the chief executive officer of the panchayat, Kalyan Singh has divested them of any such authority. "The DM's have been given the powers of an ex officio special secretary (finance) so that formal release of grants could be made directly from his level to the panchayats," Kalyan pointed out.

The CM also wants to be different in terms of the flexibility of the new system. The chief minister has conceded the demand of his MLAs to be included in the new system. But roping in MLAs as mere special invitees in the district-level committees mean nothing as they will not enjoy statutory powers.

This, in fact, is something which is bothering many of the MLAs. "At the grass-roots level, everyone will now run to the *gram pradhans* to get their jobs done," a BJP MLA points out.

Kalyan Singh is aware of this too. Deferring the implementation of his scheme till the election eve obviously sends out the political message loud and clear. The CM and his party may be banking on the fact that dangling the carrot of power-sharing will stem the rot unleashed by infighting and corruption. After all, the BJP's prospects were turning to look grim in at least 50 (out of 85) Lok Sabha seats. •

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow

SCIENCE

More of the same

Researchers want to collect DNAs from 'modern heroes' for cloning in future

It's clone-time, folks! Even as a brand-new version of *Star Wars* is taking the celluloid world by storm, the master of the scientific universe, Stephen Hawking, is being urged to "give life to a later-born twin"! The Clone Rights United Front (CRUF), based in New York City, has written to the disabled genius, requesting him to "store his DNA" for a geotype to "receive the gift of life by being conceived through cloning".

The 57-year-old astrophysicist — author of *A Brief History of Time* — heads the list of several 'modern heroes' being drawn up by the CRUF, "the world's first pro-human-cloning organisation". The hit-list could range from Bill Gates to Steven Spielberg, Nelson Mandela to Mohammed Ali, Bob Dylan to Ravi Shankar! And all that is required of these contemporary greats is to allow collection of tissue (e.g. scraping the inside of the mouth) or blood cell (e.g. a pin prick) samples for their DNA.

"Humanity Must Conserve Its Best is one of our mottos. And so the prospect of cloning one of the greatest scientific minds of our time is simply fantastic," says Randolfe Wicker, founder of CRUF and a member of the board of directors of the Human Cloning Foundation (HCF), based in Atlanta, Georgia.

Water, water everywhere

And not a drop to drink. Is Guwahati heading for a disaster?

Everytime it rains, Guwahati struggles to keep afloat. As the city grows and its concrete jungles claim the surrounding greenery, problems multiply for this burgeoning north-eastern metropolis. And one of the problems that seems to be getting soggy by the day concerns the city's drainage system, which is choking as a result of mounting urban pressure.

The problem has cropped up as a result of hyped-up building activities that have reduced the seepage space for rain water. With open grounds yielding to upcoming buildings, cemented pavements and macadamised roads, more water is flowing into drains than dripping down to underground aquifers. This has been revealed in a paper by Manik Kar, Centre for Disaster Management, Tezpur University. The paper has been abstracted in the *Journal of Geography and Environment* published by Vidyasagar University, West Bengal.

The findings are based on a study of 570 randomly selected spots in the city. The paper reports that 64 per cent of the spots showed "storm water congestion as a major problem".

rgia. Incidentally, the CRUF had conducted a "Clone Diana: One Good Lifetime Deserves Another" campaign in September 1997, weeks after the death of the 'people's princess'. "It was both a tribute to Diana as well as an effort to give a human face to cloning," explains Wicker.

In Stephen Hawking, the pro-human-cloning organisations feel they have a "stellar example for genetic encore". Hawking has been suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease) for almost "all his adult life". The motor neuron disease that was first diagnosed when the young Hawking was engaged in research on cosmology at Cambridge, has now reached a stage where he is paralysed, unable to speak or move without mechanical aid. But that has not impeded his scientific quest or diminished his zest for life. And on the issue of cloning, he is reported to have said: "I can't see any essential distinction between cloning and producing brothers and sisters in the time-honoured way."

Encouraged by all this, the CRUF, in a recent letter to Hawking, has asked him to "...enrich us all by allowing us to keep your DNA. We need your genotype to help us understand and grapple with the issues of the next millennium".

And one of them will surely be that of human cloning. "The issue of human cloning is rather small at the moment. But it is just a matter of time before it becomes very, very big. Eventually, there'll be human clone clinics," promises Dr Richard G. Seed, who is spearheading pro-human cloning research and campaign from his laboratory in Illinois.

The move to approach some of the pioneering achievers of our times for their DNA adds a whole new dimension to the ongoing cloning debate. Ever since Dolly the Sheep lost some



SECOND EDITION: Stephen Hawking

cells to the cause, the prospect of human cloning has loomed large over the scientific community. The controversy now rages over the thin dividing line between "therapeutic cloning" and "reproductive cloning".

Growing suspicion or opposition to the concept of human cloning has seen pro-clone groups like the HCF and the CRUF being sidelined and all but silenced. But if Richard Seed and Co. are to be believed: "Human cloning is the future of mankind. It signifies the Age of Biology that has already started, and which will make the Age of Computers look like chicken-feed." •

Sumit Das Gupta/London

blem". In other words, there was too much water for these outlets to successfully flush. And according to Kar, "the growth trends of population, built-up area and discharge characteristics" were behind the waterlogging.

And growth figures of humans and automobiles shown in the report appears phenomenal. While the human population grew by 45 per cent — from 1,00,707 in 1961 to 1,46,026 in 1971 — the number of motor vehicles increased by 21 per cent — from 19,897 in 1961 to 24,079 in

NO WAY OUT: file picture of Guwahati



SUMAN DUTTA

1971. If this looks somewhat worrisome, the figures for the two following decades are alarming. Between 1971 and 1991, the population soared by 295.5 per cent from 1,46,026 to 5,77,591, registering a yearly growth of 14.75 per cent, which is several times the national average. During the same period, the number of vehicles rose by 228 per cent — from 24,079 to 79,160 — and the built-up area expanded from 83.80 sq.km in 1961 to 132.19 sq.km in 1991.

The population boom and the consequent construction activity have been triggered by three factors, says Kar: a) the shift of the state's capital from Shillong (now in Meghalaya) to Guwahati in the early Sixties and the establishment of a large number of offices and companies; b) refugee influx after the Bangladesh war in 1971; and c) the improvement in transport links with the introduction of night buses and suburban trains.

The impact of this runaway urbanisation has been twofold. On the one hand, the area for recharging of groundwater aquifers has shrunk badly, and, on the other, the generation of garbage and sewerage has gone up several times. But, according to the study, efforts to tackle the problems have badly fallen short. As a result, the study observes, the incidence of water-borne diseases are on the upswing.

And all this leads up to a rather curious situation in which the citizens of Guwahati may have to suffer frequent waterlogging on the streets, while getting increasingly less to drink as underground reserves of water dwindle with the rate of recharge being reduced over time. •

Sk. Amirul Rahaman/Calcutta

Talking straight

*Intelligent and honest programming:
the new mantra for success*

Suddenly, there's a flood. New shows are opening on Star and Star practically every day, in a serious bid to woo viewers. Star seems to have realised, finally, that it was going nowhere fast with such Doordarshan left-overs as *Chandrakanta*. It was all right to begin with when the channel had to proclaim its Indian face. But now it has to seriously reinvent itself for it to be taken seriously.

If Sony has grabbed the hip and the happening 15 to 25 year-olds, with a great deal of help from AXN, Star is now moving in to corner the older people in the same category. *Aur Phir Ek Din*, a serial on the travails of death and divorce, starring Soni Razdan and Kiran Kumar, made a promising beginning last week: it features men and women in their early thirties with young children. So it appeals directly to the same age group.

A bright move, if it works, because this has been a very neglected section of the audience. It has been assumed that



SERIOUS STUFF: Neena Gupta in *Dard*

this bunch has no use for soaps and serials and that news and current affairs programmes are enough to keep it watching.

The success of such 'grown-up' serials as *Saans* has proved that this is a myth. Your so-called new intellectual could be as happy with, say, a Rajit Kapur as she is with Prannoy Roy; all she needs is intelligent and honest programming. That means if *Star Bestseller* — a new one-hour fiction slot — does a straight lift from a Stephen King novella for its first offering, it needs to say so upfront.

Siddhartha Basu does a light-hearted quiz show targeting professionals. Dalip Tahil hosts a snazzy series on Bollywood genres and the first instalment on lost-and-found twins and look-alikes was great fun. Bharat Dhabolkar's *Shock TV*, full of horrific chases, smashes and spills, wasn't.

TRIPURA

The invisible hand

The ambush at Takunbari. Was the ISI involved?

Tripura has had its share of violence. And the recent one involves the ambush of a vehicle belonging to the security forces, killing of *jawans* and the looting of arms and ammunition by militants. But the incident at Takunbari in south Tripura, in which six people, including five *jawans* of the Tripura State Rifles (TSR) were killed, has unearthed the direct involvement of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence.

On 10 July, a TSR vehicle was ambushed near the India-Bangladesh border at Takunbari. All the five *jawans* and the driver of the vehicle were killed. The ambush was allegedly carried out by the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF). Having killed the men, the miscreants escaped with five self-loading rifles and ammunition. With their mission accomplished, the ATTF men disappeared safely into the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh.

The director-general of Tripura Police, K.T.D. Singh, went to the ambush site immediately. After preliminary inspection, Singh said that the militants, for the first time in the state, used landmines to blow up the TSR vehicle. He revealed that a group of 20-25 militants had launched the ambush using four landmines, all of which were of foreign origins. They also hurled eight to nine grenades in the attack.

Two landmines, which did not explode, were handed over to the army for further investigation. Singh said that the landmines used in the ambush were pumpkin-shaped which were not like those used by the Indian Army. It was also pointed out that these mines were supplied by the ISI Ultras who took part in the ambush were highly trained, Singh said.

The DGP went on to reveal that the ISI, along with a Bangladesh-based hardline Muslim militant outfit named Harkat-ul-Jihad, had masterminded the ambush at Takunbari. Singh said that the outfit, led by one Muhammad Sajid, is also trying to unite other insurgent groups in the north-east. Following the incident, an alert has been sounded in the state to prevent ISI agents and ultras from entering Tripura through the porous international border, Singh revealed.

Meanwhile, an enquiry has been ordered into the incident of arson and assault on the villagers of Takunbari and adjoining areas immediately after the ambush. According to the DGP, a group of around 50 young men, carrying sophisticated weapons and clad in khaki uniform, stormed three villages in the area and set fire to at least 100 huts belonging to the tribals. The rampaging gang also assaulted villagers, including women and children. Selim Ali, inspector-general, who is leading the investigation, has been asked to submit a report.

The ruling CPI(M) has condemned the assault on the villagers and alleged that the "heinous act" was perpetrated by the *jawans* of the TSR. A statement issued by the CPI(M) has said that the *jawans* should understand that innocent tribals were not responsible for the ambush and they had no hand in it. The party has also demanded exemplary punishment for the *jawans*.

Kuntala Chakraborty/Agartala



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 25 JULY, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

You are in the danger of biting off more than you can chew. Be wary of loading yourself with more than you can handle. Your energy is quite likely to run out in the middle of a busy schedule, so keep your plans relatively simple. Patience is crucial to the success of current undertakings.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

You can take it easy now. Conditions should now allow you to work at a slower pace and get back to full strength. Routine occupational affairs should be less demanding. You may be in the mood for some light-hearted fun. Children may provide just the sort of company you are looking for.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Great satisfaction can be derived from doing jobs, however menial, well. Business trips can lead to recreational pursuits. Creative interests can be turned into lucrative money-making ventures. Legal rulings may go in your favour. You may outgrow relationships and friendships that were valuable before.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

An ability to let bygones be bygones will leave you more open and free and also not burden others with guilt and recriminations. Be more ready to own up to mistakes or to give way to greater experience. A weekend getaway will prove to be relaxing.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

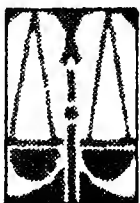
You should do what you can to conserve your energy for the week ahead. You may play a constructive role in local neighbourhood affairs. Your suggestions for improving facilities in the vicinity can be energetically taken up. Some careful preparations can make the working week flow more easily.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

You will feel better for sharing your good luck or possessions with others. Those who suppress their innate generosity will probably be subject to self-recriminations afterwards. There may be happy developments in romance. Time spent with loved ones is likely to give you the lift you need.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

It is certainly worth your while to try to influence events rather than sitting back and waiting. Influential people can be less conventional-minded than you had thought and allow you more leeway to carry out your plans. You may have outgrown relationships that were valuable to you before.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

It is unwise to burden yourself by taking on more than what you can comfortably handle. Success will come from doing one thing at a time and doing it well. Loved ones may speak more than they actually should. Their personal likes and dislikes may make them see actual facts in a distorted manner.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

The home can provide a heaven of peace and security. You will almost certainly need quiet conditions if there is any concentration or intricate work to be done. Keep your options open in business and financial affairs. There can be a sudden need to change the course.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

You may experience a renewed thirst for knowledge and learning. Books, museums and educational establishments can open doors to new subjects of interest. It's an excellent time for joining new study courses. Happy love affairs can develop for those who are single.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

Do not look for immediate or dramatic results. The company of friends will lift you out of the doldrums if you are drifting into them. You will be happy pursuing studies with like-minded people, but do not take on new responsibilities in group situations.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

You are advised to treat financial affairs with extreme caution. Speculative activities should be avoided. Someone who was once a colleague may attempt to put the screws on you in financial or emotional ways, but do not acquiesce to black mail of any kind.

War and after

Has anyone kept any account of what it cost India to fight the Kargil war?

The super nationalists will argue with horror that even to ask this question is anti-national. But some recent events in the ministry of defence are forcing bureaucrats to pose this query.

When the war was on, it was open season on procurements. What the defence services asked for, they got. As everyone knows, defence expenditure is a sensitive subject: because there are so many rules about buying equipment and it is all so expensive.

In the circumstances, the summary transfer of a joint secretary last fortnight who was dealing with weapons procurement is significant.

Why was he moved? Was it because he listened too much to the services or not enough? No one knows.

Legal debate

Should a criminal lawyer become the solicitor-general of India?

This issue has created a major debate in the legal fraternity. While it is true that in future, economic crimes/offences are going to be the order of the day, there is hardly any research or expertise in India on laws concerning white-collar crimes. As law and order is a state subject,



Ram Jethmalani: soliciting support

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

They're talking about a Kargil tax. But the real issue is the Kargil takes.

A VIGILANCE OFFICER COMMENTING ON CORRUPTION IN DEFENCE DEALS



Soli Sorabjee: will he win?

there is always a battery of state advocates-general who provide opinions to the Centre on issues of criminal law.

It is not that we haven't had criminal lawyers as

solicitors-general — K.T.S. Tulsi was one such. But a solicitor-general should be an expert on constitutional law.

Why the debate? Because

CHECK-LIST

Industrial houses: who's in who's out with the government these days

■ **Reliance:** Has a blow hot blow cold relationship with the government. While the Ambanis are close to the Prime Minister, on the telecom issue they're opposed to the PMO.

■ **Ispat Group:** Pramod Mittal is a loyal supporter of the BJP.

■ **The Hinduja:** They continue to be the PM's admirers and support the BJP.

■ **Zee Telefilms:** They have access to the PMO and other ministers in the BJP government. Have got several concessions from the government as well.

the lawyer law minister Ram Jethmalani wants to appoint as solicitor-general has a background/practice of criminal law and was Jethmalani's junior for sometime. This move is being opposed by attorney-general Soli Sorabjee.

So who's going to win? Hard to say right now. But probably neither. Because while Jethmalani is bound by the code of conduct which does not permit him to make any appointments, Sorabjee may not get his job back if the BJP comes to power again, since a lot of people are unhappy with him.

Setting a custom

Indian customs are having success after success. After having intercepted a Pakistan-bound ship full of deadly weapons off the Kandla coast, they've been called to a chief minister's conference to give a presentation on how they've used and adapted technology to their work.

They are the only service to have been given this honour. The finance mini-



Yashwant Sinha: pleased

ster, Yashwant Sinha, congratulated them on having reported revenue returns far in excess of figures reported from income tax. So, the Central Board of Excise and Customs is justifiably pleased. It is good time for them. •

RANDOM NOTES

Prestige fight

Will the real Maharashtra strongman please stand up?

After Sharad Pawar's exit from the Congress, his *bête noire* Suresh Kalmadi announced his return to the party. At a press conference he stated that he would fill the gap that Pawar had left. Not many bought that one;



Suresh Kalmadi: can he make it?

no one is expecting Kalmadi to deliver Maharashtra on a platter, but the least the Congress expects is that he wins his old constituency, Pune.

However, that's easier said than done. During the last elections, even with the tacit help of the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance, Kalmadi could not win. Now, he has to fight not only the BJP-Sena but also Sharad Pawar. And Pawar has made it clear that Pune would be a prestige seat for his party.

But all that is for later. Since Kalmadi does not

HEARD IN BOMBAY

Q: Why does Bal Thackeray always wear the same unwashed striped shirt?

A: Because he doesn't want anyone to say he's changed his stripes.

A NATIONALIST CONGRESSMAN

want to give up his Rajya Sabha seat, he has to first prop up a candidate that he can trust; and in these uncertain times there is only one person he can count on — his soft-spoken and gentle wife, Meera.

Which just goes to show that it's all very well to party hop—but then, all you'll get is fair-weather friends.

CHECK-LIST

Dumped! Parties the Congress promised to help but betrayed

■ **Haryana Vikas Party:** The Congress promised Bansi Lal support. Granted that there were some conditions. But Lal would have fulfilled them. However, former Congress chief minister Bhajan Lal's hostility was so sharp that Bansi was lulled into believing that the Congress would support him and then given the push. The move has won the Congress no support.

■ **Tamil Maanila Congress:** For months, the TMC waited for a signal from the Congress that it was going to distance itself from Jayalalitha. The party kept them guessing. Now, that it has taken a decision — allying with the AIADMK — the TMC has heaved a sigh of relief and is pressing ahead for 'simple, honest' rule in Tamil Nadu in the next election.

■ **Trinamul Congress:** The Trinamul was given several assurances that the Congress would take it back into the mother party. Many trespasses of Mamata Banerjee were overlooked. However, when nothing happened, the Trinamul joined up with the BJP. It is now an unshakable ally, and will remain so, until the Congress can shake the CPI(M) off its coat-tails.

■ **Republican Party of India:** The stab in the back hasn't yet come, but it will. The RPI said it would stay with the Congress but it expected at least 12 seats in the Lok Sabha elections. There is no way the Congress is going to give it 12 seats — four on the outside. Then the RPI will also walk out of the alliance, protesting about broken promises.

High fidelity

■ Anyone heard Kamal Nath recently? He's just back from a trip to the States and this time he's bought himself a brand new voice. The old, rasping tone has been replaced by a younger, crisper sound. (All the better to deliver those election speeches with!)

Last fortnight, Nath went to the Mount Sinai hospital in New York for a surgery on



Kamal Nath: new tone

his vocal chords. And so what if the hospital was in the United States, Nath found not just an Indian, but a doctor from Madhya Pradesh to operate on him (the surgeon is an MBBS from Rewa). Says Nath smugly, "My state produces the best in everything — from doctors to leaders!"

Well, you can change the voice, but what do you do with the rest of him? However, it's a start. •

Demarcation line

The Prime Minister has always kept his office away from his party affairs. For instance, PMO officials never accompany him to a party meeting — and in fact, most have not seen the inside of the BJP headquarters at Ashoka



Atal Behari Vajpayee: his own master

Road after they moved to South Block

It's a quaint style of functioning, but ever sensitive to criticism from the *parivar*. Vajpayee has tried his best to see that the twain don't meet. For when there is no interaction, there can be no interference.

Take the recent meeting at Pramod Mahajan's where the PM and home minister L K Advani were shown presentations by advertising agencies about how the BJP ought to run its election campaign. No PMO official was present.

While some BJP leaders argue that this cuts the PMO off from the rest of the party, it's a philosophy which has ensured that Vajpayee's PMO has no R K Dhawans

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

Q: Why has everyone stopped wearing checks in PMO?

A: Because no one wants to lose their shirt — cheques is all they take in the PMO these days.

A CONGRESSMAN

Food for thought

For the Karnataka chief minister, the lunch was a means to an end. But, unfortunately for him, his guests took their food very, very seriously.

Last fortnight, J H Patel invited George Fernandes, Jaya Jaitly and Ram Vilas Paswan over to the Karnataka Bhavan in Delhi for lunch. The general idea being that they could discuss a future alliance over some food.

However, when the media cornered them at the table, Fernandes declined to comment on the political situation. "I have come here only to eat," he announced. A

sheepish Patel then muttered something about wanting to organise a Chinese meal, but the kitchen had prepared something Indian instead. Both Fernandes and Jaitly smiled politely, but Paswan quickly interjected saying a little (to make his host feel better), "*Bhayee, asli Chinese to Taiwan meth milta hai. Buki sab to uska kee hai*".

Quick to catch on to the cue, Jaitly made polite inquiries about Paswan's recent trip to Taiwan. Fernandes, however, whose views on things Chinese are well known, kept quiet.

That's an international perspective on Bihar politics!

CHECK-LIST

The Kargil tax controversy: who says what

■ **Finance minister:** Yashwant Sinha says the finance ministry still has to make up its mind on whether the country really needs to levy a tax to compensate the Kargil war. If revenue collections are buoyant enough, this may not be necessary.

■ **Prime Minister's Office:** Believes that if money is to be raised, it should be done now while patriotic fervour is still alive. Later the fiscal deficit will hit you anyway and it will be too late to raise money.

■ **Economic pundits:** Say that with the hike in world oil and crude prices, India's bill for oil imports is going to be higher than normal anyway. Plus, with ambitious disinvestment proposals which are not going to yield the expected Rs 10,000 crore, it is hard to say how fiscal deficit can be curbed.

So what the government is trying to do is bridge the deficit by a tax raised in the name of Kargil. However, this is such a transparent accountancy fudge that there is no way the government can get away with it.

Speaker's choice

The Lok Sabha secretariat is jubilant. After decades, a non-IAS officer has become the secretary-general of the Lok Sabha.

G C Malhotra, who has got the job, is from the Lok Sabha secretariat service, a person who has risen from the ranks. He faced stiff competition from a colleague who got leader of the Opposition Sharad Pawar and even the Prime Minister to call the Lok Sabha Speaker, G M C Balayogi, to lobby against Malhotra.

However, much to the



G.M.C. Balayogi: defying the powers that be

jubilation of the Lok Sabha staff, Malhotra has managed the prestigious assignment which has a term of five years and three months, as of now.

When the PM called Balayogi, the Speaker told him firmly that he had made his decision and nothing could induce him to change his mind.

So this is yet another occasion when the Speaker defied the powers that be. He may have shot himself in the foot this time — it is unlikely that he will become Speaker again.

But the new secretary-general is not complaining.

Pierce Brosnan's Choice



Constellation
Chronograph
OMEGA - Swiss made since 1848

Omega by choice Pierce Brosnan

Ω
OMEGA

The sign of excellence

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WOMEN IN FILMS: COMING OF AGE

SUNDAY

**The former PM of
Pakistan on:**

- **Politics in
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- **Her plans to
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**BENAZIR
BHUTTO**

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



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Consistent manipulator

Deve Gowda's sole agenda: there must be no challenge to him and his sons in Karnataka



FOCUS 12

The war...from the other side

Memorabilia from Kargil



Test by fire

This refers to the cover story *Victory!* (18—24 July). A victory in an armed conflict in which the people have lost their lives is not exactly an occasion for triumphalism. But the Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has good reasons to look at the Kargil conflict, as

began, it seemed to have all the potential of being a major embarrassment for the BJP government.

Priya Trehan, New Delhi

■ Vajpayee's mettle was tested in his refusal to talk to the political leadership of Pakistan before it withdrew the intruders from Indian soil. This refusal to compromise on the most important issue has secured for Vajpayee a place in history.

The sangh parivar to which Vajpayee belongs has in it many extreme elements which have floated many lunatic ideas and tried to whip up perverse jingoism. But Vajpayee has kept himself above all this. He has not allowed his policies to be blurred and his rhetoric to be overwhelmed by a gush of populist sentiments.

Through Kargil's test by fire, Vajpayee has come of

Kargil and China

In the column headlined *Back on track*, 27 June—3 July), the writer has pointed out that the Indo-China relations are improving for the better, in the aftermath of Kargil and after Jaswant Singh's visit to Beijing. But, it will be wrong, as has been rightly pointed out, to jump to conclusions and create the hype.

China's co-operation to Pakistan in its nuclear and missile programmes is an open secret. Pakistan's Ghouri missiles, capable of carrying nuclear warheads, certainly wouldn't have been possible without Chinese assistance.

But despite this, China has taken a somewhat neutral stand on Kargil issue. The reasons are not far

gil issue. And while most of the world community has come to condemn Pakistani aggression on Kargil, China thus could not support Pakistan in the face of such adverse world opinion.

L. Rohini, Tiruchy (Tamil Nadu)

War-struck

We are to blame ourselves for the callousness and gullibility, we let our guard down because of the Lahore Declaration and we had to fight a grim battle to recover lost territory (*Shell-shocked!*, 4—10 July). Successive coalition governments comprising disparate parties with needless jingoism have led the country to such a pass.

After Pokhran explosion, we thought we would blast our way to get recognised as a world power. Instead, it soured our ties with China and our standing in the developing world took a severe beating. Then, in no time Pakistan crossed the nuclear threshold too. The moot question is: can we afford a war?

Mukund B. Kunte, New Delhi

Right choice

The story *Can they save Indian cricket?* (11—17 July) made a delightful reading. Azharuddin should be relieved of captaincy immediately and time has come for him to hang up his boots and depart with grace.

Ajay Jadeja should be given the top job. Jadeja came out with flying colours whenever he was assigned with the job. He had the ability to motivate his teammates and always maintained perfect harmony between the captain and other players.

Jadeja has always been cool and confident. And he has the perfect temperament



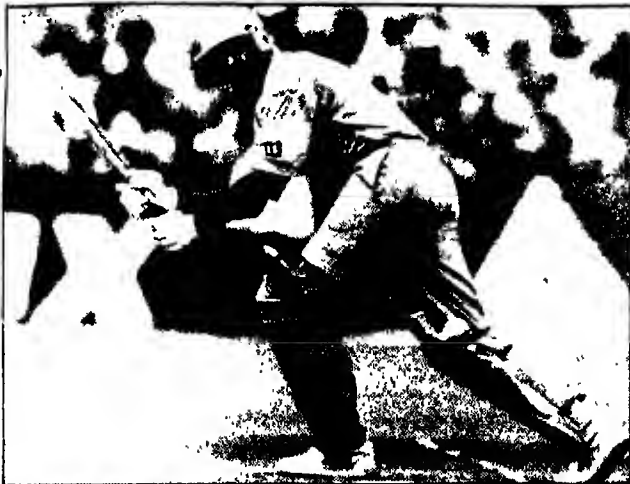
A.B. Vajpayee: the Kargil war has earned him a place in history

it draws to a close, and at the way he and his government have handled the crisis with some satisfaction. This achievement is important not only because the stakes are very high but also because when the crisis

age. The politician who thought only of Hindutva is now a Prime Minister who thinks of India. He has won the war; the challenge now is to win the peace.

Bimal Chaudhury, Calcutta (West Bengal)

to seek. Fundamentalists trained in Pakistani *madrasas* are creating problems for China in the border areas. China is clearly worried of growing Islamic fundamentalism in those areas. Hence its cautious stand on the Kar-



Azharuddin: time to depart with grace

to carry out the job. He has proved his mettle as captain before. The BCCI must decide the issue of captaincy in his favour unanimously.

Bhupen Bose, Calcutta (West Bengal)

The N-bomb effect

Even as the international community's post-Pokhran II hostility seems to have thawed considerably with our country's remarkably restrained handling of the Kargil crisis, it's queer indeed that the columnist has yet to get over his bomb-baiting fixation (*Nuclear deterrence and Kargil*, 11—17 July).

If, according to the columnist, the Kargil incursion has been a direct consequence of India's turning nuclear, how does he account for Pakistan's invasion of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947 and 1965? The fact is that Pakistan being an almost habitual aggressor, didn't exactly need to be empowered with an N-bomb to commit its blatant transgression into the Indian territory.

But for the dreadful loss of lives, diplomatically, the Kargil conflict has actually been a blessing in disguise for India. By exercising tremendous restraint even

under great provocation, we have been able to prove to the world that we are a very responsible nuclear state. With the Kargil conflict being the fifth war and the fourth invasion that India had to contend with, the world now seems to have come to terms with India's compulsion to turn nuclear. In sharp contrast, with its brazen nuclear blackmail, Pakistan has proven to be a rogue state and has, therefore, been diplomatically isolated with its Kargil misadventure.

The Chagai explosion coming on the heels of Pokhran II, is an indication that with or without Pokhran II,

Pakistan was anyway on the verge of turning nuclear. And if Pakistan's nuclearisation had preceded ours, with all this nuclear muscle-flexing, wouldn't we have cut a sorry figure today?

Nalini Sudhakaran, Trivandrum (Kerala)

Historic blunder

This refers to the story *The politics of war* (4—10 July). We had wars with Pakistan in 1948, 1965, and 1971.

Unfortunately, a highly egoistic leader with distorted vision became our Prime Minister after the Partition. He did not bother to come to the rescue of people affected by the worst undocumented holocaust in the history. Luckily for us, we had the iron man Sardar Patel for about two years.

In 1948, our soldiers made sacrifices and secured us two-thirds of Kashmir and Pakistan Army was on the run. Gen Thumiah, the then commander of the Kashmir operations wanted a week to take over the rest of Kashmir. But Nehru at the behest of Lord Mountbatten agreed for ceasefire and took the Kashmir issue to the UN.

Nehru's long-

standing ally, the USSR was not willing to help us. There are hardly any similar blunder in the Indian history. Even now, due to the successive Congress governments' foreign policies, Western nations, who matter most, don't trust us.

K.R. Kumar, Shiribeedu (Karnataka)

Tale of a Raja

This refers to the column headlined *Enough is enough*, 11—17 July). It has been rightly remarked that V.P. Singh is an irresponsible politician. He can do anything for votes. However, there is nothing special about it. All the political leaders, particularly those showing concern for



V.P. Singh: costly treatment

the poor and downtrodden, do so just to hide their real intentions.

But what I abhor most is Singh's contempt for everything Indian, particularly when he says that his haemoglobin level tends to go down when he is in India. Thank God, it did not happen when he was the Prime Minister! Otherwise, he would have been running the government from a hospital bed in England or the USA. It is unfortunate that the so-called *Ganban ke Masih* are the greatest enemies of the poor, if not traitors. In fact, the country's current state of affairs is because of their diabolical designs.

V.S. Garg, Moradabad (UP)

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Politician



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Film-maker

Contributed by Bratati Pradhan, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

APPOINTED: P. C. Mahalan, an economy, finance and revenue. An IAS officer of the 1964 batch from the Madhya Pradesh cadre, he takes over from Vijay Kelkar.

APPOINTED: M. Rameshwar Kabir, as the Bangladesh deputy high commissioner in Calcutta.

APPOINTED: Om Prakash Chautala, leader of the Indian National Lok Dal, as chief



minister of Haryana, on 24 July.

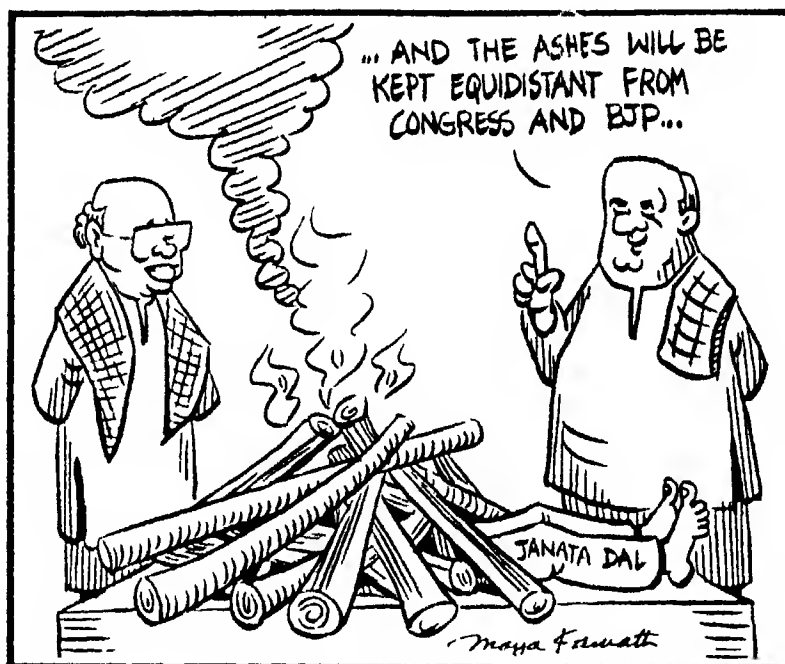
APPOINTED: K. Padmanabharath, as the Centre's principal representative to hold peace talks with the NSCN (I-M). He replaces Swaraj Kaushal.

DIED: David Ogilvy, advertising guru and founder of Ogilvy and Mather, in France, on 21 July. He was 88.

DIED: Sandhyarani, veteran Bengali film actress, on 25 July, in Calcutta. She was 75. She had acted in over 250 films.

AWARDED: to the National Literacy Mission, UNESCO's US\$ 15,000 Noma literary prize for 1999

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH THE ASIANA

■ Acts of terrorism must stop immediately because such actions make the Kashmir conflict more difficult to resolve

MADDELINE ALBRIGHT US secretary of state

■ It has been India's policy to wriggle out of a serious dialogue to resolve issues. It is time that India should avoid using the name of dialogue as a tactical ploy

SHAMSHAD AHMED Pakistan foreign secretary rejecting India's conditions for resuming bilateral talks

■ We will not allow a foreigner to rule the country

RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE Lok Shakti president in Sonua Gandhi



■ Pay channels will be the future driver of business. They are bigger revenue generators than advertising.

SUBHASH CHANDRA chairman of Zee Network

■ Security and development must go hand in hand

AMARIYA SEN Nobel laureate on the need to balance defence expenditure with economic growth

■ I think it is Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee who should be credited with the renaming of the city and the state

JYOTI BASU West Bengal chief minister on the all party resolution passed by the state Assembly to rename Calcutta and West Bengal

■ It's so hard to play a bimbettie when you're intelligent

RAVEENA TANDON film star

Major revamp

Yashwant Sinha has changed the entire set-up in the finance ministry



In a sudden exercise, the entire set-up in the finance ministry has been changed by the Prime Minister and the finance minister. So far, nobody knows the reason for such a

major revamp at North Block in which all the secretaries have been changed. Now, we have got new secretaries for finance and revenue, banking, economic affairs and expenditure.

The exercise shows that finance minister Yashwant Sinha was not too happy with his team. Though the economy is showing signs of improvement and the last Budget was appreciated by all, it seems that Sinha wanted a new team before the next Budget.

All the changes were done at the behest of the finance minister and there was no interference from the Prime Minister's Office. The PMO had a different list of names for the appointments. Sinha made his own blueprint, took it to the Prime Minister and got it approved directly. No bureaucrat other than the Cabinet secretary was involved in the whole exercise.

The names of Piyush Mankad, N.K. Singh and Venugopal Reddy were in the run for the job of finance secretary. It seems Sinha had put his foot down on Singh's appointment as the relationship between the two has not improved even after several rounds of courtesy calls.

Sinha still believes that Singh sabotaged his first Budget as revenue secretary and Singh does not find any logic in this allegation. On the other hand, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is too happy with Singh and wanted to retain him in the PMO.

There is a joke in the media that NK is the minister of telecom nowadays as he is handling the work of the telecom department in the PMO. Reddy lost the race because his name was linked to Mohan Guruswamy who is *persona non grata* for this government.



Yashwant Sinha made the blueprint of the exercise, took it to the Prime Minister and got it approved directly. Only the Cabinet secretary was involved in the whole process

Mankad was found to be the best choice because of his pragmatic and positive approach, apart from his past performance and friendly nature. He always gets along with his minister. Nobody had imagined that Mankad would become the most powerful bureaucrat, being finance and revenue secretary both. After K.P. Geethakrishnan, he is the only one to be designated as finance secretary in the capacity of being revenue secretary.

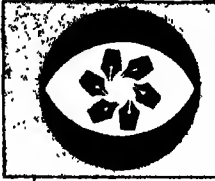
Similarly, nobody had imagined that Javed Choudhary would be removed so soon from the job of revenue secretary, particularly when revenue collections were increasing. It is said that Sinha was not happy with him because he was too strict. The allegation that he is close to a Gujarat-based exporter, Gautam Adani, is baseless and absurd. And this could not have been the reason for his transfer.

The finance minister is happy with

the work of E.A.S. Sarma, who was made secretary, economic affairs. At one point of time, his name was in the run to be finance secretary also, but it was turned down as he is a close relative of Subramanian Swamy.

In the banking department, Sinha wanted an officer who could have better relations with industrialists and businessmen. Devi Dayal, an IAS of the Uttar Pradesh cadre, was selected for this job. Dayal has been additional secretary in the petroleum ministry, too, having an impeccable record.

With the recent changes, all the IAS officers of the 1966 batch have become secretaries except Ashok Joshi and Bhure Lal. They are also likely to be accommodated in a month or two. Prabhakar Kumar as Cabinet secretary must be praised for keeping the train running for the bureaucracy. •



Former Test cricketer Mohinder Amarnath once called our cricket selectors a 'bunch of jokers'. After retirement, Amarnath joined the

BJP. So far, he has not commented on the presence of jokers in his party. But had he joined the Janata Dal, the situation would have been different. The JD is the biggest joke in Indian politics.

And yet, there are front-page newspaper headlines and editorials on the recent split in the JD. Why should the media be concerned with the Janata Dal and give it so much importance? The leader of this 'outfit' is the nincompoop Sharad Yadav. His position is challenged by Deve Gowda. Such is the low level of Indian politics that three leaders from this clown outfit, V.P. Singh, I.K. Gujral and Deve Gowda, had functioned as the



Circus!

Divide, merge and redivide: the mantra of the present-day Janata Dal

country's Prime Ministers!

Most newspapers commented on the recent happenings in the Karnataka Janata Dal. I had always wondered why the sensible people of this state voted for a JD government. An *Indian Express* editorial rightly pointed out to the unease within the BJP to welcome a section of the JD to its fold. It rightly assumed that the Samata Party leader, George Fernandes, was keen to bring together his party, the JD and Ramakrishna Hegde's Lok Shakti only to strengthen his bargaining position vis-a-vis the BJP both for the seats and the spoils of office in case the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) returned to power. Why should the BJP be lured into an alliance with a party which had split nine times in as many

years? Sharad Yadav's willingness to support the BJP was motivated solely by selfish interests.

I am happy that most of our newspapers saw through the game played by George Fernandes in the recent political development. The editorial, 'Suspect Reunion' in *The Asian Age* explained that Fernandes, who had played ball with the *sangh parivar*, had shown, yet again, the ability to change sides several times in his interesting career and this is what he had done now. "This time, the quicksilver artist has taken the lead in getting several comrades-in-distress together on a single political platform by exhibiting a 'new' and 'united' socialist model in the political marketplace. The reunion reeks of expediency, but that

does not seem to have acted as a deterrent to the players in the drama. The born-again socialists will start singing their chorus once more."

Comparing the Janata Dal to the elusive Phantom, *The Times of India*, commenting on its 'dramatic resurfacing', stressed the fact that it was programmed to divide, merge and redivide. We can now expect a 'battle' over the issue of the 'real Janata Dal'. *The Times* editorial, 'Lotus Dal', was highly sceptical of Fernandes' move to reunite the socialists. By the way, why does George call himself a 'socialist'? The editorial explained yet again the socialists' uncanny knack of wrecking anything that came their way. "Socialist leaders like Jayaprakash Narain, Ram Manohar Lohia, J.B. Kripalani and Ashok Mehta might have made fiery leaders, but each was also a prima donna, which ensured that the movement was never free from splits, defections and expulsion." Fernandes, besides being a political chameleon, was too small a fry to be included in the category but his destructive power was greater.

Bad press

The media-armed forces honeymoon established during the Kargil conflict is slowly waning. I read a news report where a senior army officer felt that the role of the Indian Air Force in the con-



Such is the low level of Indian politics that three leaders from this clown outfit, V.P. Singh, I.K. Gujral and Deve Gowda, have functioned as the country's Prime Ministers!

flict was overplayed by the media. The air force will not like this one bit. Rahul Bedi (*The Asian Age*) wrote that the army demanded circumspection from the media and got it most of the time. Today, the fighting being over, the army's attitude towards the media had hardened in view of the questions raised over the failure to detect and act upon the Pakistani infiltration in Kargil.

Officers had been told not to talk to journalists. Why? Says Bedi: "They simply do not want journalists exposed to the anger and sense of betrayal junior officers and *jawans* feel towards the senior commanders for needlessly placing them in a situation where 410 of them were killed and another 593 injured."

According to Bedi, army commanders want only adulation from the media. Well, they seem to have got a full quota of it during the fighting days.

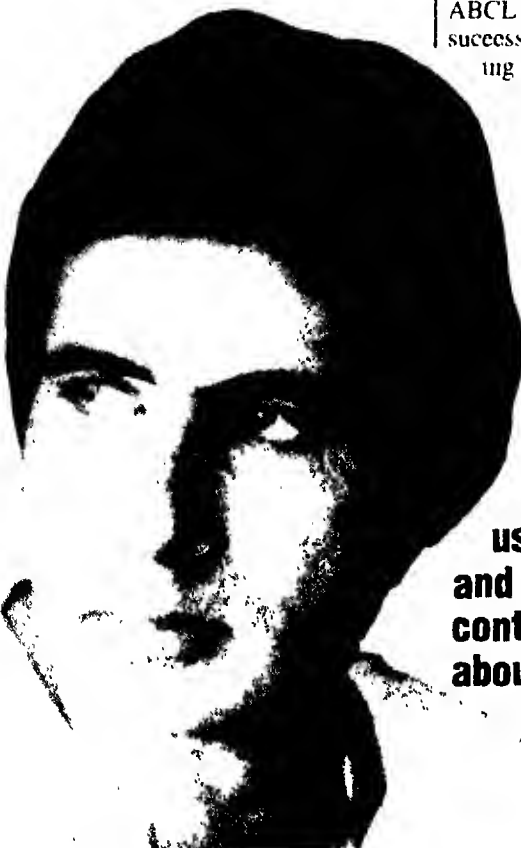
Bedi mentioned the runaround experienced by the media while covering the operations. The army worked at cross-purposes. Passes and permission granted by one section were not recognised by others. For a brief period, reporters and cameramen were provided free access to the forward areas. But, according to Bedi, "A combination of ignorance, excitability and inexperience led to television networks airing shots of Indian artillery batteries, revealing their location to Pakistani gunners who marked them with devastating effect. A crucial attack on Tiger Hill had to be postponed after a naive Star TV reporter enthusiastically revealed its imminence the night before." These are serious charges and I hope will be looked into by the network bosses. Writing a mush-mush piece in *Outlook*, Madhu Trehan mentioned that a gossip campaign was underway about Barkha Dutt (Star TV reporter) being responsible for the deaths of Indian soldiers while the firing was going on.

Bedi came down heavily on the expensive conducted tours organised by the

army for the media. "One such gaggle of cameramen and reporters were escorted, nanny-like, by Brig. A.K. Chopra to Kargil's military hospital to meet Hunnar Shah, the soldier from Pakistan's 5th Northern Light Infantry Battalion rescued by Indian soldiers after he was wounded in a gun battle. None of the reporters, however, were allowed to talk to or question the Pak soldier, they had to direct their queries through the Brigadier."

Best of Bachchan

In his interview with Sejal Shah (*The Week*), Amitabh Bachchan was unusually forthcoming. There was less of the usual self-deprecation and he answered controversial questions about his tottering career and the ABCL mess. Bachchan explained why some of his recent releases failed to click in a big way at the box office. He had not thought of retirement because he wanted to work. The current crop of stars were more intelligent and talented. Actors like Salman Khan did not depend solely on his rippling muscles to win laurels. ABCL was going through a bad patch mainly because of mismanagement and the incorrect information fed to the board. But he had never regretted launching ABCL which had several potentially successful ventures on hand. The holding of the 'Miss World' contest at Bangalore was not a mistake, but ABCL was bled white by the authorities, including the local police. •



In *The Week* interview, Amitabh Bachchan was unusually forthcoming. There was less of the usual self-deprecation and he answered controversial questions about his tottering career and the ABCL mess

Consistent manipulator

Deve Gowda's sole agenda: there must be no challenge to him and his sons in Karnataka

H.D. Deve Gowda, former Prime Minister, ex-chief minister and humble farmer, has come into his own. He is now doing to the Janata Dal what he has done to Karnataka: making sure of its liquidation.

One thing you have to say for Deve Gowda: he has been consistent in everything he has done. As far back as January 1998, Gowda and his opponent (and colleague) S.R. Bommai, announced that there should be no delay — Sonia Gandhi must take over the reins of the Congress and lead the Opposition against the nefarious designs of the BJP.

There was a reason for this. And it had nothing to do with issues of secularism either. In January, Gowda, like many others, visualised the decimation of the Janata Dal in Karnataka if it decided to fight against the Congress. He realised that the Congress was poised to make major gains in the state. So it was prudent to push for the split while the Congress was ready to have him. There was no law that an ex-Prime Minister could not be a chief minister. And if he wanted to become chief minister, he needed the Congress's help.

Skilfully, the Janata Dal was manipulated towards that end. Laloo Prasad Yadav had been forced out of the JD in 1997, when he and Deve Gowda were slugging it out to capture the Dal presidency. Finally, Sharad Yadav was appointed the party chief with Deve Gowda being a significant presence. Yadav did what he was asked to do, when he announced in 1997 that the Janata Dal had but one *lakshya*: the defeat of the BJP.

Gowda first tried his hand at splitting

the Karnataka Janata Dal. True, J.H. Patel was not the most efficient of chief ministers. But Gowda did everything to undermine Patel from foisting state party presidents and deputy chief ministers on him to using his sons — ministers in the Patel government — to spreading the reign of Gowda terror in Karnataka.

In many ways he pushed Patel beyond the limits of endurance, into the arms of the BJP. By declaring that he was in favour of an alliance with the Congress knowing perfectly well that it would be Patel's primary adversary in the state in the elections, Gowda deliberately provoked Patel to take a stand on his relationship with the Opposition.

Actually the trouble started five days after Patel became chief minister of Karnataka. Patel declared that he would have a small ministry of 30 to 35 ministers. During the swearing-in though, the government had swelled to 45. The ministers included B.L. Shankar and Kumaraswamy, Gowda's political 'adviser' and his son.

Gowda egged on his ministers to create trouble for Patel. Ramesh Kumar, one of the 'dissidents', was made the Assembly Speaker, so he shut up. But every time Patel tried to reshuffle his Cabinet, Gowda's men were encouraged to create trouble.

And last year things went really out of control. Three ministers and some MLAs joined Ramakrishna Hegde's party. In October, the Dal legislature party decided to throw out Patel and it was only the arrival of Sharad Yadav which saved the day for the chief minister.

Guess who was behind the ouster move? Surprise! Surprise! H.D. Deve Gowda.

So what happens now?

One thing is clear. Even if the Lok Shakti, BJP and Karnataka Janata Dal contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections together, they don't have a snowball in hell's chances of winning either.

But then the path for the Congress and the Deve Gowda-led Janata Dal is not paved with roses either. The integration and adjustment between the Lok Shakti, Janata Dal (Patel) and BJP will be stormy but they will all be working towards one goal: to keep Deve Gowda at bay.

On the other hand, the Congress has a good chance of winning the Assembly elections and maybe even a sizeable number of Lok Sabha seats. However, it can only do so if it can keep Deve Gowda at bay. There are enough Vokkaliga supporters of the Congress — and therefore, enough aspirants for seats — for the Congress to give any seat to Deve Gowda.

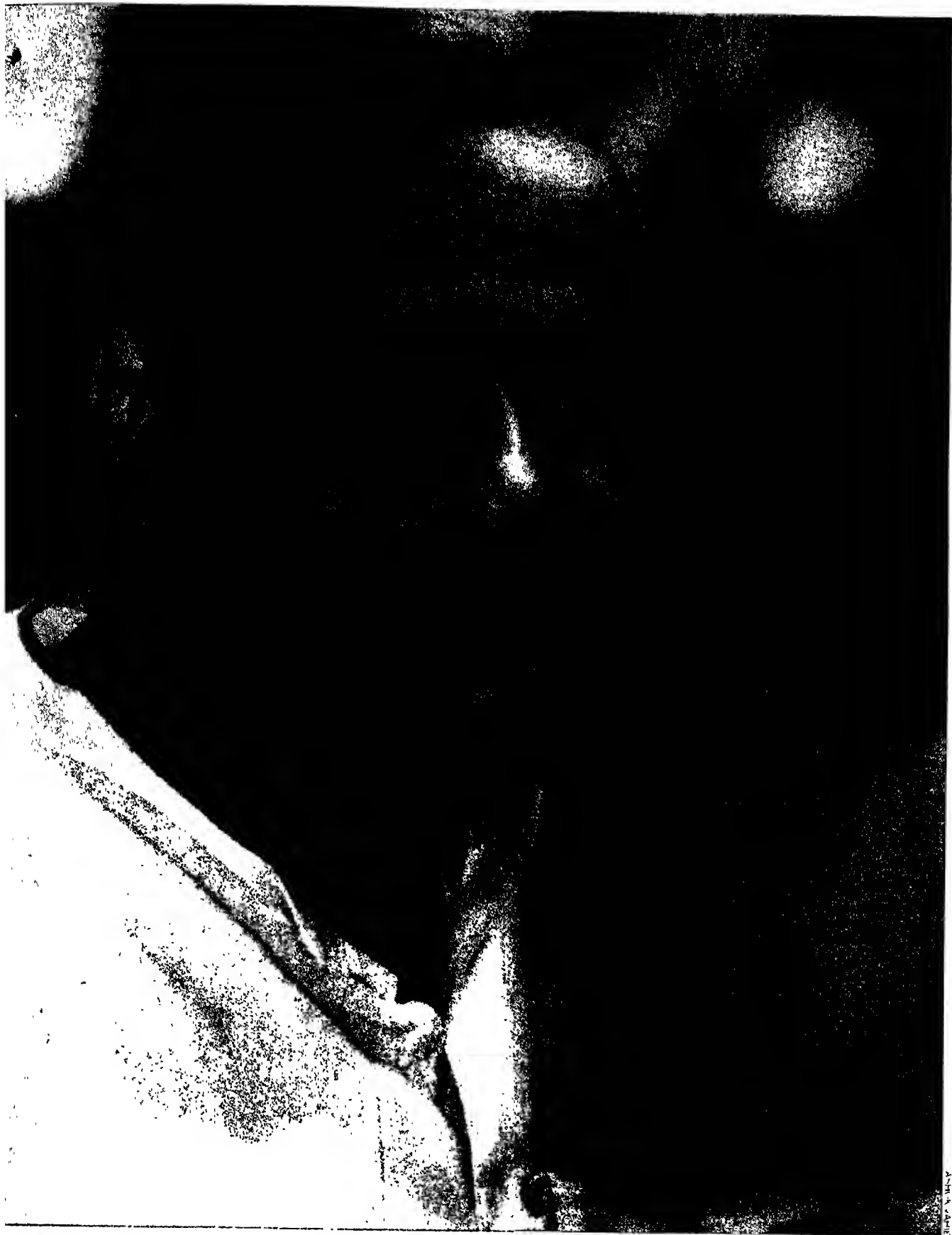
Gowda, on the other hand, can keep the 'original' Janata Dal base alive only by power and patronage of winning an election. If seats are not available to him, the Dal will go elsewhere.

JD has already gone elsewhere in the rest of the country, thanks to the disintegration of its base. Gowda has never shown himself as overly keen to build up the party. Such has been his obsession with Karnataka that the rest of India hasn't really mattered much.

Which is exactly the point. This split and Patel's decision to side with the BJP and its allies have been in direct response to Deve Gowda's constant war of attrition against the former. Gowda imagines that now that he has control of the Karnataka Janata Dal, he can win the war in the rest of India.

So, actually considerations of secularism and communalism are hogwash. The only thing that matters to Deve Gowda is: there must be no challenge to him and his sons in Karnataka. And in the rest of the country, a genuine wave of anger against the BJP can be used to serve this purpose.

For those who still remember the spirit of the Janata Party in 1977, this is a sorry spectacle. There was a time when the Janata Dal, even if it had no base, could always pride itself on an enlightened leadership. Unfortunately with the Deve Gowda-engineered split, even that redeeming feature is now lost to it. •



The War...

FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Memorabilia from Kargil

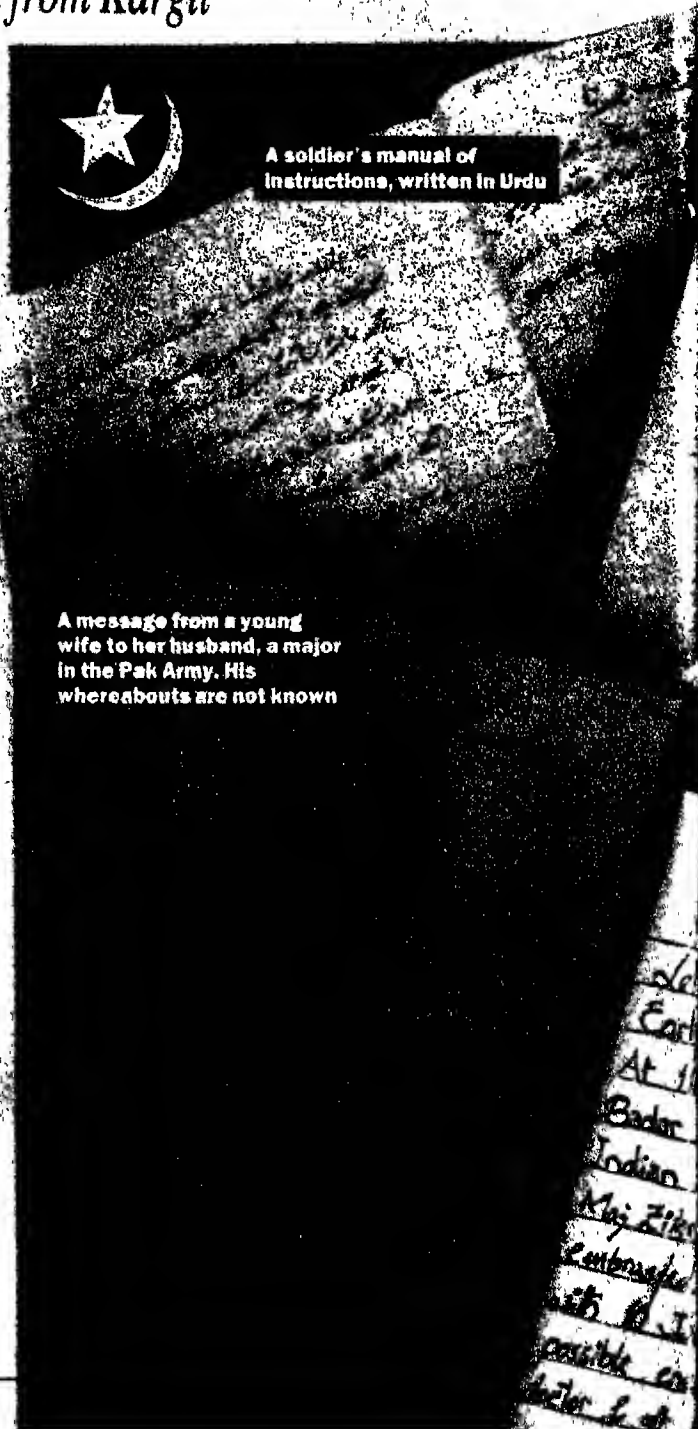
"My wife told me, on no account are you making these things public. I said, why not? All is fair in love and war," said the young Indian army major as he showed visitors the trophies of the Kargil war.

And what trophies. You felt momentarily ashamed of intruding on what were obviously the most private moments of Pakistani soldiers. There were photo-folders, not unlike the ones our soldiers carry with them on the front, identity cards with mysterious hieroglyphics which must have meant something to the owners, diaries, and tiny objects which superstitious soldiers all over the world carry with them as mascots: rosaries, cheap silver rings studded with coloured stone, photographs of generously-endowed Pakistani film actresses...

All memorabilia of the Kargil war captured from posts — and bodies — abandoned by the Pakistanis establishes one fact without doubt: that the Pakistan Army was absolutely and indubitably present in India till it was turfed out. There is more than enough evidence — uniforms, letters, notebooks with instructions, memos from one army officer to another with operational details, envelopes with addresses of the army officer to whom letters were sent from wives, sisters, fathers and mothers.

Also found on the posts were lanyards, buttons testifying to the presence of the Northern Light Infantry (NLI), badges and pay books. Even the results of the stool and urine tests which some soldier must have sought from an army hospital laboratory (the tests were clear).

The Pakistani soldiers were not cowards. Only two were taken Prisoners of War and even when they were encircled by the Indian Army, they refused to surrender, preferring to fight to their death.



A soldier's manual of instructions, written in Urdu

A message from a young wife to her husband, a major in the Pak Army. His whereabouts are not known

But looking at all the stuff they left behind in their posts, you wonder why India and Pakistan fought against each other at all. There was a diary with instructions on how to lay a certain kind of mortar. "Johnnies are like that," said the major who showed SUNDAY around the exhibits, oblivious to the irony. "You keep telling them not to have anything identifying them, but they must have these instructions with them." There is no difference in the instincts of a soldier, whether Indian or Pakistani.

However, he was disgusted with the way the Pakistanis had treated their soldiers. "Look at it

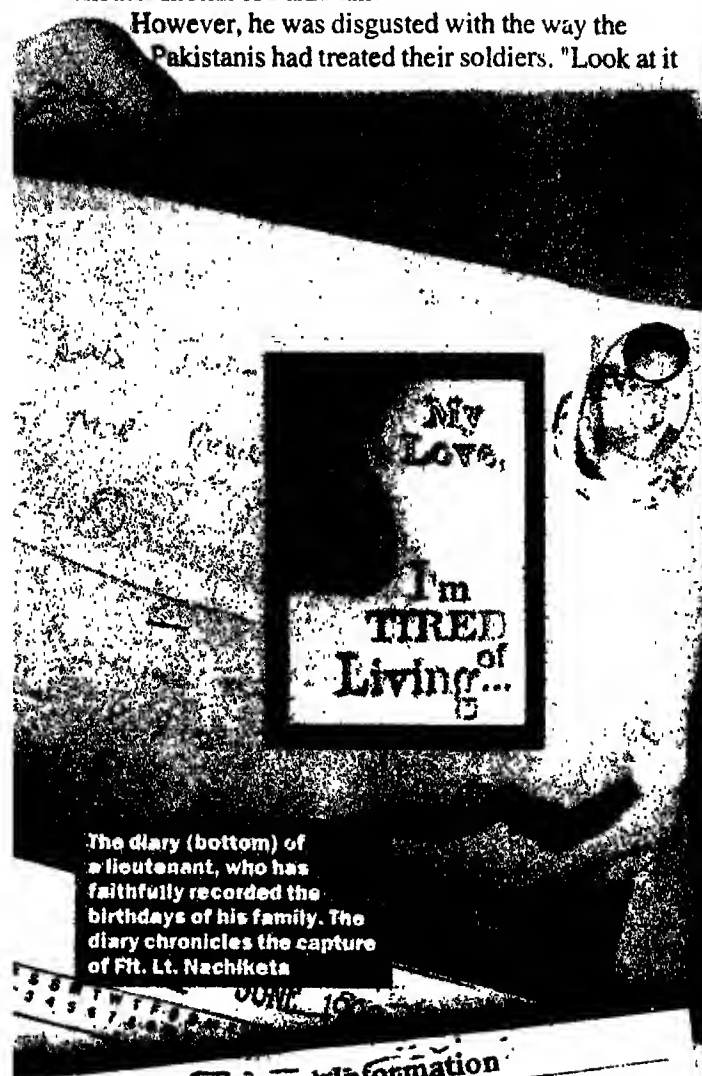
this way, Ma'am," he said indignantly, "they fought for their country. But while every Indian heart is bleeding for its soldier, they couldn't care less. They left the bodies of their men in the hills to rot."

This is true. An Indian regiment on one of the posts was asked to stop fighting and return but it ignored the call until the soldiers had recovered their officer's body. This is the dharma of the soldier.

The most poignant is the diary of a lieutenant who is obviously terrified out of his wits by the fighting, but will never say so. In his daily report of 'What I Did Today' (at the bottom of the page are carefully-recorded birthdays of his whole family: sisters, Ammi and Abbu), he records that four of his colleagues attained *shahadat*. He says he was in his bunker when at 3 am, his bunker was hit and the wall collapsed, but 'Thank Allah, nothing happened'.

For the Indian Army and the foreign office, these trophies of war are a prize catch. They nail the Pakistani lie that 'freedom fighters' and not Pakistani Army regulars were involved in the war. It also shows up the callousness of the Pakistani Army which treated soldiers like cannon fodder, not even bothering to collect their bodies.

A message from a Pakistani Army major indicating operational details of postings and heights



The diary (bottom) of a lieutenant, who has faithfully recorded the birthdays of his family. The diary chronicles the capture of Ft. Lt. Nachketa

Personal Information

Name: Lieutenant Muhammad Khaz Ullah Khan Sumbal
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 Address (Office): 8 NLI, c/o FPU-B Tele Off: _____

Birthdays - Anniversaries

Name	Date	Name	Date
Obaid Bhai A.D.	2 JUNE	TAMMOZ A.D.	26 JUNE
My Birthday	12 JUNE	ABBU'S A.D.	17 AUG
SALMAN SUMBAL	24 SEP	AMMI'S A.D.	25 DEC
MAN ARSHAN	9 OCT	ABBA'S WEDDING	1 NOV

Kargil has isolated

Benazir Bhutto breaks her silence to talk about the Kashmir issue, Nawaz Sharif, Indo-Pak relations, and her plans to 'live apart' from her husband

INTERVIEWED BY SHRABANI BASU/LONDON

While the guns were blazing in Kargil, Benazir Bhutto had remained silent. The 47-year-old former PM of Pakistan had been travelling between London and Dubai, but not commenting on the situation in Kashmir. It would have been unpatriotic to speak out then, she said. But the moment Nawaz Sharif pledged to withdraw from Kargil, she was ready to break her silence.

Charged with corruption and sentenced to five years' imprisonment in Pakistan and a fine of US\$ 8.6 million, Bhutto has been based in Dubai ever since the conviction. It is there that she spends most of her time with her three children and her mother Nusrat who is suffering from dementia. At present, she is contesting the charges from London.

The Pakistan government alleges that Bhutto owns seven lavish houses in London, including the 355-acre Rockwood estate near Haslemere in Surrey. Her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, has been in a Lahore jail for two years now on the charge of corruption and murdering her brother, Murtaza. But the Pakistan government has run up so much on lawyers' fees to trace the former PM's 'cash' in London that they have been issued a writ by the lawyers for unpaid bills.

Bhutto, who is planning to have a second base in London, has found a place in West Kensington for the next two months. In between her hectic schedule, Benazir Bhutto talked exclusively to *SUNDAY* at the Gore Hotel in Kensington, a few doors away from sister Saman's flat. She was her usual charming self. Excerpts from the interview:

Q: Let's get straight to Kargil. What do you feel about the present settlement by Nawaz Sharif?

A: Kargil is the biggest blunder that Nawaz Sharif could have undertaken. First of all, what was the point of going into Kargil when the snow comes in September and you have to come down again? What was the purpose? Was it to tell the world that we are unreliable partners, was it to threaten a nuclear war? I think Nawaz Sharif made a dreadful mistake. And I think some heads should roll. I cannot understand why he should be allowed to continue in power after having put Pakistan into Kargil, endangered the process of peace in the subcontinent, compromised Pakistan's position, compromised the army, compromised the Kashmiris, compromised Vajpayee in India because he went on the bus diplomacy. Why did he have to go on a bus diplo-

macy when this is what he had planned?

It's astonishing that he wants to continue in power after humiliating Pakistan. First he went to Kargil and said I'm not going to withdraw, his brother said we've got nuclear power, and his minister said we've got nuclear power and we are all going to eat grass. Then he goes to Washington and comes back with his tail between his legs. And now he says I'm going to appeal to the Mujahideen to withdraw, that also means he has influence with the Mujahideen. And nobody knows if they are Mujahideen or army regulars, because the world is calling them army regulars. And if they are army regulars then that itself is mind-boggling that Pakistan goes to war with army regulars without taking Parliament into confidence. Can a democracy have an unaccountable regime that operates in a secretive manner?

"Personally I am very close to him [Asif Zardari] ... But maybe it is important for him to step out for a while, while I do politics. Then he can decide what he wants to do when I am not doing politics"

COVER STORY

ated Pakistan'





Nawaz Sharif: "If today he has to please President Clinton to survive he'll do it, if tomorrow he has to please Mr Vajpayee to survive he'll do it, if the day after he has to please the Mujahideen to survive he'll do it"

I think it's time to say is this man going to get away with it?

Q: You had said right at the outset that Pakistan would be isolated diplomatically.

A: Yes. I knew the invasion of Kargil would isolate Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif had nearly taken South Asia to the brink of nuclear war and jeopardised Pakistan's position with all its friends. I have been Prime Minister of Pakistan twice. I have been given briefings where militarily we could have achieved certain objectives which could have triggered a wider conflict and I had vetoed them saying Pakistan lacked the political and diplomatic support. That is what Nawaz Sharif should have done. I kept quiet while the men were in Kargil because it would sound unpatriotic, particularly because Nawaz Sharif had convinced the whole nation that he was going to conquer Srinagar, but I am ready to speak out now.

I knew it would be another Iraq. I knew it would be what happened when Saddam went into Kuwait and then he was forced out of Kuwait. At that time also, Nawaz Sharif had

made everybody feel that Iraq was going to win. Now that he has ordered the withdrawal no punches should be left. He should come out and say why did he order the Kargil operation. And give the impression that it was the army not him. Because that also pitted Pakistan's civilian and military population against each other. The army could not have done it without him. He sacked General Khurana for making a statement he didn't like and he couldn't stop Musharraf from starting a war? Who's he trying to fool? He's got total power. I didn't have total power, but at that time I was told about things that could be done militarily, and I vetoed it.

Nawaz has betrayed Pakistan, betrayed the prospects of Indo-Pak peace and betrayed even the struggle of the Kashmiris, because the Indian government had agreed to talk about this dispute.

Q: So what would have been your formula to settle the affair?

A: Well, you have to go one or the other way. You cannot have it both ways. In my first term, we had very good relationships with Ravi Gandhi and we made a lot of advances and I can say that the times when my father or I have been in power, those have been the best for our relations. In my last term, I made a mistake in holding the Kashmir issue as the single issue between India and Pakistan. It is not the single issue and now when I look at the future and think of what ought to be done in the future, I think it is very different for India and Pakistan to decide about land. It's a very emotive issue. But in this light over land we have forgotten many things. For instance, we have forgotten about the Kashmiris, we have also forgotten that Partition was meant to pave the way for peaceful co-existence. It was not meant to pave the way for a more bitter conflict. That's what Jinnah said. We cannot live as one nation, so let us live as two nations so there can be peace in South Asia. So we lost sight of what we really wanted to do and I would like to see India and Pakistan and all of South Asia look back on the last 50 years and see what can be done differently in the next 50 years, so that we do not relive the mistakes of the past.

I would like to see India and Pakistan sit down and have negotiation for open borders at the start between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad. In the open borders, Pakistan would have to undertake to police it and India would have to undertake to withdraw its troops and to begin a dialogue with the All Party Hurriyat Conference who are the representatives of the Kashmiri people as far as we are concerned. But I think the opening of the borders would enable the people of Kashmir to travel back and forth freely, it would lead to a peaceful environment, the governments of Srinagar and Muzaffarabad could meet from time to time to discuss the obstacles and issues that need to be resolved because of the open borders and these open borders should be part of a larger plan for open borders between all of South Asia. Not just between India and Pakistan, but the whole region.

"I would like to see India and Pakistan and all of South Asia can be done differently in the next 50 years, so that



And, you know I had started on this plan way back in 1988 when I had proposed that there should be a common travel document between all the people in South Asia so that they could visit each other, go without any visas. And I had proposed that there should be a common postage stamp. An idea which was an admirable one was the European unity, the European community. They had been rulers of the world but the nature of wealth had changed. America is the new example of how it is the economy of scale which brings prosperity. It's not whether you are self-reliant, it's not whether you do things efficiently on a small quantity, it's not the quality, it's the quantity that matters.

In America they bring things from Taiwan, they bring things from all over the world, they go and farm out to places that can produce cheaply. Therefore I feel to compete in the 21st century, we've tried socialism to get rid of poverty, we've tried nationalism to get rid of poverty, we've tried capitalism, but we haven't tried economy of scale, and I think what's needed for us is to try economy of scale and to work together as the European community is working together with the goal of the common trading currency, the goal of a common central bank. And ultimately perhaps China and Iran would also like to join this huge market. And we could certainly dictate the pace of a very large sector of the market with our population. With the consumer demands that would be made, we'd attract investment.

Q: What about the LoC? Would you like to see that established as the border?

A: Well, I leave the Line of Control issue to Nawaz Sharif. I don't know whether he's recognised it in Washington or not, but I think what we do need to do is to be less obsessed about land, because it becomes very emotive, and I think

The Kargil conflict. "If you had to withdraw from Kargil, why did you go into Kargil? I wouldn't have gone into Kargil. I twice vetoed the idea and I think he [Sharif] should have vetoed it too"

we should say, let us leave that, we are talking about open borders. You see the formalisation of the Line of Control, some people think it's a very good idea, but it's an open question as to whether the Kashmiris could accept it, and if they don't accept it this could come up again and upset the applecart. So my view is that without prejudice to both country's positions, let's leave it for another generation. First let us start the open heart and the open minds, let us deal with people, and if the minds open up and the hearts open up, and we become less obsessed with land, maybe another generation will be able to come back to this issue. And what will the next generation be like with information technology already dictating a new political landscape? Territorial boundaries had greater sanctity before the computer could enter everybody's homes without recognising boundaries. So these whole concepts are going to undergo a transformation in the coming generation.

Q: You have been calling for China and USA to mediate over Kashmir, calling for a Middle-East or a Northern Ireland-style peace settlement...

A: Yes, if India and Pakistan can do it between themselves that's the best. But if India and Pakistan cannot do it between themselves, then I think it's a good idea to get some outside help, so that all of South Asia is not punished because of the political leadership of the two countries. But if the two countries can do it themselves, that's the best. My father and Indira did it in 1972, Rajiv Gandhi and I were able to do it in 1988, and if we can do it again, fine.

h Asia look back on the last 50 years and see what we do not relive the mistakes of the past "

Benazir with Asif Zardari: "He's a brave man, he's a strong man, he's politically very savvy. If I were not in politics, my husband would be in politics in his own right"

That's the reason we welcomed the bus diplomacy, but at the time we said that Nawaz is not sincere with the bus diplomacy. We said he's only interested in making money by selling sugar to India. There's no vision.

We had the parliamentarians' conference, it was a great success. But he wanted to overshadow it, so he said why don't we go on this bus thing. So you've got to have actions as part of larger national vision, not actions that are meant to promote partisan commercial goals. And that's what was missing in the bus diplomacy. He thought he could please everyone. I think he's compromised Pakistan. There has to be a change of leadership in Pakistan because the people of Pakistan want accountability for this humiliation. There has to be a change of leadership for credibility. Not just India, how can anybody trust Nawaz Sharif after what he did?



Q: And what about the Lahore Declaration? Do you think it's dead?

A: I think the Lahore Declaration is a good start. But I think it should continue in a substantive way, not a Lahore Declaration between Nawaz Sharif for a sugar trade and so on. I think South Asia has to learn from the developed countries. What are the developed countries doing that are helping them to prosper? What could we be doing differently, without compromising our principles? My formula on Kashmir does not involve a compromise of principles by any party and one of the reasons that I wasn't resolved was that it called for a compromise by one of the parties.

Q: You admit now that you were hawkish on Kashmir in your second term. You raised Kashmir at every international forum. What has made you change your attitude now?

A: Well, you know, people say I have been the Prime Minister of Pakistan twice. I think I have not even been Prime Minister once, in a proper sense like Nawaz Sharif has been. When I was elected Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif said I would only be Prime Minister of Islamabad because I didn't have Punjab with me. Punjab is where the military comes from, Punjab is where the *madrasas* are and if you have a coalition partner, he's not going to listen to you, you

"Nawaz Sharif has betrayed Pakistan, betrayed the struggle of the Kashmiris, because the Indian gover

have to be in the driving seat. We didn't have a constitutional majority, so we couldn't bring in women and minorities in a manner that would have given us the political support to sustain a political dialogue, in order to take the quantum steps that were necessary in South Asia. We were always looking after our flanks. We were always concerned that the Islamists would overthrow us. In our first term, we were overthrown by the Islamists, who had rigged the elections, thrown mud on us, made charges against us. So, in our second term, we thought what can we do to prevent this? So, even if we can't run Pakistan fully, we can run Pakistan half, and there let our social programmes be done. So, if we can't run internal and external, let's run internal and leave external to others so that there can be a happy marriage. And we found that not only does it not work, but we alienated many of our own supporters.

And I'm now trying to go back to the people of Pakistan and saying please give us one chance and even if you don't give us one chance, this is what we think of the last decade and this is what you can expect from us. I don't believe in secret negotiations. Nawaz Sharif is a great one for secret negotiations, so he can play all sides. I think you have to be clear to people in public and private as to what you want

Q: There was a time when Rajiv Gandhi and you were in power together and it was considered the dream team. You were both 'midnight's children' in a sense and had a rapport. How did the dream fade?

A: Well, the dream didn't really fade when Rajiv Gandhi was there. I felt the dream faded after he went. While he was there, that's when we started the hot line between the two countries, confidence-building measures, trade items, we even had successful defence-secretary talks on the withdrawal from Siachen. Then Rajiv Gandhi decided to call elections. India went back on that agreement. I was at the Commonwealth and he phoned me and said, "After my election I'll stick to the agreement but not now". But anyway he lost the election. The new government of V P Singh that came in was a coalition government and things somehow went down, and then we were thrown out. So the next time round when we came we thought this is not a way to be thrown out, because we were accused of being pro-Indian, pro-Israeli, pro-Western. We were not. We

were pro-Pakistan. We were pro-South Asia. We wanted the best for our people but we thought we could silence these voices by a particular policy.

But 1996 showed, no, you can't. If they are against you, they will remain against you no matter what you do. So even now, in 1999, if I had come down from Kargil I would have been hanged in the public square. He can blunder into Kargil and get away with it because he is one of them. They feel they are in power, that he is buying time, that it is a tactical retreat, it's not a strategic retreat. With me they feel that the whole strategy and vision is lost.

Q: But if you were to go back today, the Islamists and fundamentalists would still be there...

A: Right now, we are going public with what we want to do. We are not trying to co-opt them. So if we win and



Victims of violence in Kashmir: "In the fight over land, we have forgotten about the Kashmiris. We have also forgotten that Partition was meant to pave the way for peaceful co-existence"

come to power, everybody will know that this is it. Before it was a theory that you've got to have some sort of compromise. Now we are not interested in compromise. Because people have seen what Nawaz Sharif can deliver. He can deliver by bringing the country to the brink of nuclear war. He can deliver by taking away US\$ 14 billion in foreign currency account. He can deliver by sacking 40,000 people from the banks alone. The military must also open its eyes and see what respect and honour does it have. In my times, they were being praised by the world community for peace-keeping efforts in Bosnia and Haiti and today

prospects of Indo-Pak peace and betrayed even the government had agreed to talk about this dispute "



Zulfikar Ali Bhutto with Indira Gandhi, and Rajiv Gandhi with Benazir:
"It's best if India and Pakistan can mediate over Kashmir between themselves. My father and Indira did it in 1972, Rajiv Gandhi and I were able to do it in 1988"

advertisements are being taken out against them as a rogue army. So they must also decide what do they want: the humiliation that Nawaz Sharif can offer or do they want the respect that the People's Party can offer.

And the people of Pakistan have to see the unemployment rates, the inflation rates, the investment rate, the Karachi stock exchange and what's happening on it and decide what they want. As for us we are coming out very clearly, that look, in our last term we tried to co-opt the liberal and the conservative, agenda. It doesn't work. Now we want to be given a chance and we want to be given a chance on these terms, these are the things that we are going to do. And if we get thrown out, so be it, because even by co-opting others we still get thrown out.

Q: What about the cases against you?

A: These are all trumped-up charges, all politically motivated. I've been denied a fair trial. A special law was passed and it's all been done to eliminate me as a liberal alternative in Pakistan, so that the only alternative to Nawaz Sharif are more radicals. And people think let's put up with this radical, because if he goes, there'll be more radicals. It's all part of their scheme to take over control of Pakistan.

And it's time for us to sit down and think that what is it in the last ten years, what were the policies that drove us to a point where the rest of the world is ostracising us, criticising us on Taliban, criticising us on Kargil, being a defaulter nation that has to go begging to the Paris club and the London club. We are living beyond our means, our entire style of living is subsidised by the West with generous foreign assistance that came with the Cold War. We have to

learn to live within our means. For 50 years, we've tried to match India, while the Cold War was there we could do it. We got dollops of aid. But now with all the debt? We have to rethink our independence. Why did we create an independent state: to live in poverty and squalor, and go on fighting wars that end up humiliating us, or did we create Pakistan to live in peaceful co-existence and to give the people of South Asia greater prosperity?

And these last few weeks have been sickening. Not only these last few weeks. Even last year, I was very distressed when Pakistan retorted to India's five detonations with six detonations. First of all I thought it was bad politics. If you had to do something, you could first of all have done a cold test, and say we are not doing a hard test. If you had to do a hard test you could have done one test. Why play this boyish game of look at me, I've got more bombs than you've got in your pocket? It was ridiculous. And then I thought Pakistan should have signed the test-ban treaty, and it could have got a lot of economic support. But instead, it said we are not signing the test-ban treaty. They had sanctions imposed, waited for our economy to be destroyed and after our economy was destroyed said we are signing the test-ban treaty. That's Kargil all over for you again. We are going into Kargil, we are not withdrawing from Kargil. Then, okay, we are withdrawing from Kargil. If you had to sign the test-ban treaty why couldn't you have done it on 28 May? And if you had to withdraw from Kargil, why did you go into Kargil? I wouldn't have gone into Kargil. I twice vetoed the idea and I think he should have vetoed it too.

Q: Nawaz Sharif is claiming that he has at last

"It's time for us to sit down and think what has driven us to a point where the rest of the world is ostracising us, criticising us on Taliban, crit



internationalised the issue. What do you say to that?

A: It was internationalised before this. What he has done is internationalise Pakistan as a rogue nation. Not the Kashmiris. He's internationalised Pakistan as a bad partner to work with, as a decentful nation. Kashmir was internationalised when George Bush mentioned it in his meeting with the Soviet President that it was an disputed agenda and had to be resolved. It was internationalised when the United Nations Secretary General said it was the oldest areas of unresolved agenda in the UN. It's not Kashmir that has got internationalised now, it's Pakistan that has got internationalised in a very bad light, and that's a setback to the Kashmiris.

Q: Isn't it ironic that instead of spending your time on political work, you have to spend it now going to lawyers and fighting the charges against you?

A: Yes, this is the thing that when you throw enough mud, some of it sticks, and what they have done is use the judicial process to neutralise political opposition to themselves. I think it's a political problem, it's not just a legal problem. I think while Nawaz Sharif is there, he can make these special laws, he can cook up, fabricate and he can send my cases to his best friend's brother, whose father happened to execute mine and others. My other cases, one is with his law secretary, one is with this judge I sacked and he reinstated and promised to make Chief Justice. So while Nawaz Sharif is there the situation is difficult, there is no rule of law. And I have to face that and confront that.

But I won't lose sight of the political goal and political vision of my party. I would like to have time out. In 1997, I wanted to have time out, I was absolutely fed up and sickened by my brother's death, and the President's betrayal and rigged elections once again, and I said this is a feeling of *deja vu*. But everyone in my party and in the country wanted me to continue and I don't do things half-way, so I threw myself back into politics when I saw that the workers were being sacked from their jobs and that prices were being fixed to deny farmers their dues.

Q: But you'd have to be based here in London and Dubai for a while...

A: Well, I don't know if I am ever based anywhere because I do so much travelling. Even in Pakistan, where I have a home in Karachi, I do so much travelling that I am one day in Lahore, one day in Multan. I've got a base in Dubai, I'm thinking of taking a base in London if I need to. Right now I have a place for two months. I may keep it for longer if I need to. Then let's see. I will be travelling between London, Dubai and America.

Q: You have a five-year jail sentence on you. It won't be easy to get back to Pakistan...

A: (Laughs) Oh I think Nawaz Sharif will be out in three months. I think he should go now in 1999. I made a speech in Lahore this year in which I said if he doesn't go now, he'll bankrupt the country and bring about its disintegration. He's not a strategic thinker. He's a tactical thinker. Everything is a tactic to survive. If today he has to please President Clinton to survive he'll do it, if tomorrow he has

en us to a point where the rest of the world
cising us on Kargil, and being a defaulter nation"

to please Mr Vajpayee to survive he'll do it, if the day after he has to please the Mujahideen to survive he'll do it. He'll please different people on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and you can't do that

Q: To get down to more personal details. You got married to conform to traditional Pakistani society and be accepted. Yet your husband, ironically, became your biggest liability. How do you feel about this?

A: (Smiles) I don't know. Tell me, are you married? Do you have a husband? What do you do when people come to you? You have your husband, you love your husband. You have your children, you love your children. You love being a family. You know that your husband has been accused of many things that he did not do. You know that your husband has been accused of your brother's murder, although the Supreme Court judge has exonerated him after my dismissal and said all the charges were based on hearsay, and speculation and has no evidential value. You know that he has suffered. He would not have faced these charges if he was not married to you. You know he's suffered because you live in a traditional society and broke the barriers of tradition, and the men ganged up and said we'll blame him, because in every traditional society, the man controls his wife. You have a tremendous sense of loyalty and love for him. But you face a world that is fed on their perceptions, not on what you know.

My husband and I have discussed this a number of times and we just think that he needs some time out so that the world can see him for what he is. I have a lot of faith in my husband, I think he's a brave man, he's a strong man, I think he's politically very savvy, he has his own constituency, he has his own life, and if I were not in politics, my husband would be in politics in his own right.

He succeeded in business on his own. He didn't take any money from his father. Under Gen. Zia, they were building a five-star hotel. Under me he's punished for building a petrol pump. They've suffered commercially, they've suffered business-wise. And he's done it all with a smile. In that sense, when you ask me how do I feel, I feel for my reality, not for other people's reality.

But my husband and I acknowledge that there is a political problem. And that this problem has to be dealt with. That God willing the day comes when he exonerates himself, he takes time out. That he does in a way what I advised my brother Murtaza to do. I advised him that people know you from what they've heard, you take time out and go to Dubai or London and live there, meet people. It's a mini-Pakistan, a mini-South Asia. There are Bengalis, there are Indians, there are Pakistanis, there are Americans, there are Britishers, let them get to know you for you, and then decide what you want to do next. But while people have this negative image it's very difficult to move. And I think he will enjoy some time out too.

Q: But there are people in your party who think



Atal Behari Vajpayee with Nawaz Sharif: "Nawaz was not sincere with the bus diplomacy. He thought he could please everyone. You've got to have actions as part of larger national vision, not actions that are meant to promote partisan commercial goals"

he's a liability.

A: Maybe those people are liabilities. Let's look down and see the people who say this. Does the individual who says this about Asif Zardari have a seat, is he a successful businessman who contributes to the party financially, does he contribute to the party politically? I don't know who these people are who criticise him. There is one person who has come up to me and criticised him, and that person can't win a councillor's election. In the end you've got to have somebody who can win in the National Assembly to have a majority. The Zardaris are a tribe, they have tribal support. My husband can win, my husband's father can win. And he's very good at networking, and back-slapping and boy-talk. He's good at networking with Opposition leaders.

Q: But if your own husband is called Mr 10 per cent, it doesn't reflect well on you. Surely that is a problem?

A: You're right. It doesn't reflect well, and so we have to do something about it which is why he's going to take time out. But if you remember, the moment he got engaged to me, rumours were spread about him. He was engaged to me in 1987, before I became Prime Minister of Pakistan, and at that time attempts were made to break up my marriage.

"These are all trumped-up charges, all politically law was passed and it's all been done to eliminate me"



ge. So was it because he was Mr 10 per cent which he is not, or is it because I happened to be a woman who broke traditional barriers, married to a young husband. I was only 35 when I was Prime Minister. All the others were older. There was intense scrutiny. None of the others had a spouse in South Asia, how would they feel if they had a spouse who was a person in their own right? South Asia is not used to that. People ask me why I am loyal, and they get angry with me for being loyal, but I think he's suffered because of me, that he was unfairly charged for my brother's murder, unfairly charged for everything.

If he was a consultant, is that a crime? When did he ever influence government policy? Who said he influenced it? When did this conspiracy take place? Where are these three billion? You can't just say half of London is his. No Pakistani law permits you to send your rupees out in bearer certificates. Even if we accept the theory that my husband bought property overseas, what's the crime in that when you allow it? Why is it a crime for him and not for Nawaz Sharif? You don't like the law, change the law. Even if you accept on face value what the prosecution says, it's not a crime under any law, because consultancies are not crimes under any law. Have they produced one witness who says they were influenced by the Prime Minister? They haven't produced people who dealt with the economic affairs of the wing. Not a single witness despite the torture, the judiciary being unable to give protection to people who are picked up and tortured.

So what I'm trying to say is that personally I am very close to him. We love each other and we want to succeed in our personal lives and in our political lives. But we understand that there has been a lot of propaganda and something

Sonia Gandhi, Chandrika Kumaratunga and Khaleda Zia: "I had told Hillary Clinton when she came to Pakistan in April 1995, that now we have Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh, Chandrika in Sri Lanka, and I'm here in Pakistan, and only if Sonia were there in India, then South Asia would have no problems"

has to be done about this, and maybe it is important for him that while I do politics for him to step out for a while, and then he can decide what he wants to do when I am not doing politics.

Q: How is your mother's health now?

A: You know my mother was hit on the head in 1977 by Gen. Zia at Gaddafi Stadium. She had a huge scar, and I remember liquid started coming out of it. We wrote to the ministry to let her go abroad for treatment, but they did not let her go. What we did not realise through all this was that around the scar line the head had been damaged and atrophy had started.

You know, sometimes I feel that if my mother had not been ill, maybe this fight that Murtaza took up with me would never have happened. But she was ill and we did not know till April 1995 that she had been ill. And it's very, very difficult. Sometimes she's my mother, sometimes it's like she's there in body but it's not her. It's had a tremendous effect on my sister and myself. We live constantly with the fact that she's our mother, and sometimes she's not, and it's very, very painful. But she's been marvellous.

Q: And what about the children?

motivated. I've been denied a fair trial. A special as a liberal alternative in Pakistan"



Benazir with mother Nusrat: "Sometimes I feel that if my mother had not been ill, maybe this fight that Murtaza took up with me wouldn't have happened"

A: The children are wonderful. God's blessings to human beings are children and sometimes when I look at my children and love them, I say does God love us in the same way? I pray to God and my three wishes are long life, health and happiness. Because I've seen the life of my father and my brothers cut short, I've seen my mother's health deteriorate, I've seen my happiness snatched away

Q: You had welcomed Sonia Gandhi's bid for prime ministership. Would you like to see a South Asia complete with all women leaders?

A: You know, I had made a joke when Hillary Clinton came to Pakistan in April 1995 and I had invited her for an all-women's lunch, with women judges, women police officers and businesswomen. And I said, isn't it wonderful that now we have (at that time) Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh, Chandrika in Sri Lanka, and I'm here in Pakistan, and only if Sonia were there in India, then South Asia would have no problems. *(Laughs)*

Let me assure the male population of South Asia that I respect them too. And let me assure Mr Vajpayee that I have no reservations against him either. But it's just that as a woman I have a greater sense of affinity for other women. I also have great empathy with Sonia because she has suffered a lot. She lost her husband at a very young age.

Her own mother-in-law was murdered and she actually carried her dying mother-in-law in her arms.

Q: Are you optimistic that you will be able to return to Pakistan soon?

A: I'm an optimist. The way I have survived these more than 20 years is by being an optimist and by hoping that something better is round the corner. Because I cannot reconcile myself to the fact that the whole nation can be so helpless and so brutally exploited by a dictator. And also I am excited by this new vision for South Asia.

Q: How do you see democracy in Pakistan shaping up?

A: It's not a democracy. It's an absolute dictatorship. I would like to see elections again to put democracy on track. Democracy went off-track in 1996 when the elections were rigged. International observers said only 18 per cent voted, while the Election Commission, which had been hacked into by the Islamists, said the turnout was over 50 per cent in Punjab alone. So who's lying? Not the international observers. Maybe the Election Commission didn't even know because they were hacked into. I've learnt that they hacked into the computers of the Election Commission and changed the results. And that's why they need that time lag of eight to ten hours after the election so they could hack into polling station by polling station. You're laughing, but it's absolutely dreadful what they have done. And Mr Nawaz Sharif was announcing the results of the polling from Islamabad before the Election Commission, because one of their guys did the whole operation of the hacking.

There is a lack of political commitment. They are all personal retainers: the foreign minister, the finance minister, the information minister and the commerce minister. How do you expect that Cabinet to speak up? The attorney-general is another personal retainer. He deals with personal retainers. There is no political discussion. His father and the two brothers have a political discussion. His father worked in a *madrassa* in Punjab in 1944 and many Pakistanis think that Nawaz Sharif is more interested in greater Punjab than in Pakistan itself.

Even the judges are many personal retainers, the High Commissioner to London was once an adviser to Itefaq, his industrial empire. The ambassador to Kenya was close to Nawaz Sharif. So you have all these ministers and high commissioners who are not there because of a political party, but a political party that is an extension of Itefaq. And Itefaq is always in loss. It can't even pay back its loans. If you look at their tax returns, Nawaz Sharif pays Rs 577 as tax. And a man who pays Rs 577 as tax, how can his wife go shopping at Harry Winston's while he talks to Clinton? *(Smiles)* That's the rumour in Pakistan now: that he took his wife to America to do shopping at Harry Winston's while the men were dying in the snows. It's high time he went. •

"The way I have survived these more than 20 years is by being an optimist and by hoping that something better is round the corner"

After Kargil

India's relations with both the US and China reach a turning point



Jaswant Singh's meetings in Singapore, on the fringes of the ASEAN Regional Forum, with the US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, and the Chinese foreign minister, Tang Jiaxuan, have brought India's relations with these two major power centres to the fore. Kargil has been, from our point of view, a turning point. For, after 50 years of pro-Pakistan tilt, the United States — and under its leadership the industrialised West — saw Kargil for what it was: an act of perfidy by Pakistan.

The relentless manner in which Bill Clinton forced Nawaz Sharif to withdraw forces from the Indian side of the LoC speaks for itself. To maintain at least the impression of even-handedness, the US President also promised that after the "sanctity" of the LoC had been fully restored, he would take a "personal interest" in the speedy resumption and "intensification" of the Lahore process for settling all India-Pakistan issues, including Kashmir.

In the words of some prominent Pakistani commentators, this document issued at Blair House had "nailed on the mast" Pakistan's "humiliation". This should explain why a beleaguered Sharif is pretending that Kargil having "internationalised" the Kashmir issue, he would now hold Clinton to his "commitment" to see to it that the Lahore process yielded results.

This, combined with the distressing history of relationship between the world's most powerful and most populous democracies, lies at the root of the widespread fear in this country that just as the US bore down on Pakistan over Kargil, it might start arm-twisting India over the wider Kashmir question, given the American paranoia about any armed conflict between the two neighbours which have openly gone nuclear since May 1998.

The proponents of this pessimistic view, which presupposes that India is incapable of resisting unacceptable demands and unable to turn foreign interest in the Kashmir problem to its own advantage, is not the only extreme view in vogue.

No less extremist are those who have somehow convinced themselves that given America's abhorrence of Islamic fundamentalism combined with terrorism, more particularly the nefarious activities of Osama bin Laden, the growing attraction of the Indian market, and the realisation that in the Asian balance of power India matters, the US is now ready for a breakthrough in Indo-US relations even at the cost of its long-term alliance with Pakistan.

In my opinion, both the extremist views must be rejected. An old mindset in a vastly changed and still changing international environment is of no help. At the same time, to assume that America will dump Pakistan for the sake of India or arm-twist it to accept a Kashmir settlement on Indian terms is to fly in the face of reality.

However, it would be a grave error not to explore sincerely



India needs good relations with both the superpower and the most powerful neighbour on realistic terms. It is welcome that Jaswant's talks with the Chinese foreign minister were as cordial and productive as those with Albright

and skilfully the possibilities of a more friendly relationship with the US. America influences all the major diplomatic dynamics across the globe. In both investment and trade it is India's biggest partner. An adversarial relationship with it is not in this country's interest.

To be sure, the US will want a quid pro quo for better relations, most probably in the nuclear field, specifically in the form of signatures on the CTBT in the first place. The American decision to despatch a "special envoy" to the US embassy in New Delhi to discuss for six months only the nuclear question with the South Block is eloquent enough. But here again candid discussion and acceptance of only what is in the Indian interest is called for. Nothing more.

Any expectation of joining hands with the United States to "contain" China or to become part of a Russia-China-India axis to "check American hegemonism" would be foolish. India needs good relations with both the superpower and the most powerful neighbour on realistic, not illusory, terms.

It is welcome therefore that Jaswant's talks with the Chinese foreign minister were as cordial and productive as those with Albright. One point that has to be thrashed out with Beijing is that China remains committed to the Security Council's resolution 1172 (asking India and Pakistan to sign the NPT, too) much more than the United States. •

The silent war

The Indian Navy's gunboat diplomacy

During the three-month-long war in Kargil, hardly a word has been said about the role of the Indian Navy (IN). In truth, the Kargil campaign was a tri-service war. It lay in wait in the north Arabian Sea, posing a strategic deterrent to Pakistan.

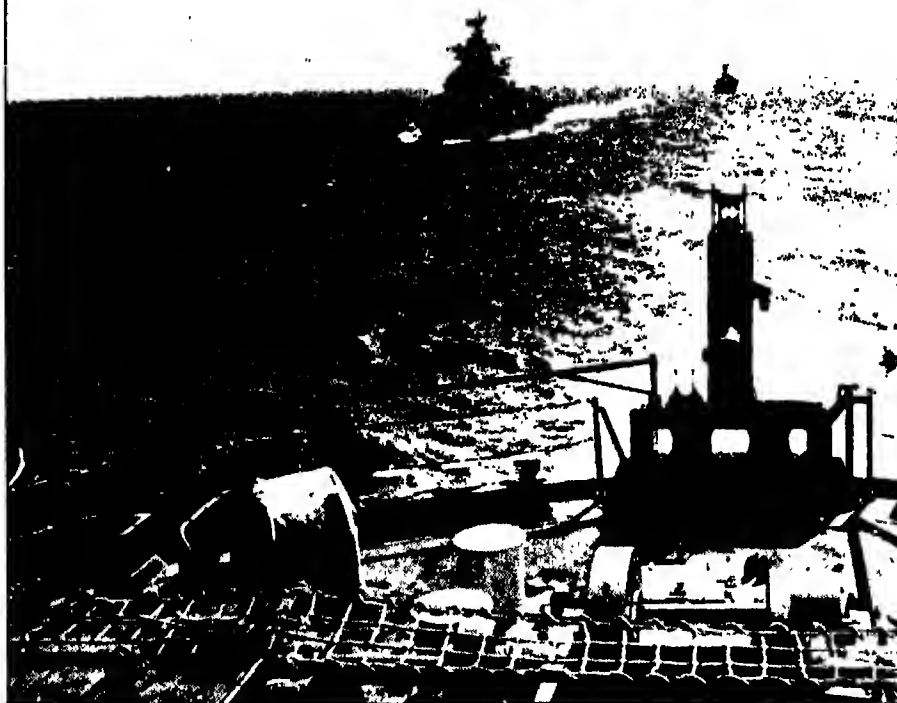
Given its experience in 1965, when almost the entire naval fleet was deployed in the Bay of Bengal, the IN was taking no chances this time. Just four ships were on the western seaboard when on 8 September, 1965, the Pakistan Navy (PN), in a prophylactic attack, struck at Dwarka. Fortunately, no damage was caused. However, the PN celebrates 8 September as Victory Day.

Once Pakistan floated the Kargil balloon, it was jointly decided by the three services that the maritime fleet be poised off the west coast to act as a strategic counterweight to any Pakistani naval misadventure on the 1965 pattern.

At this time of the year, the IN carries out joint exercises of both its fleets. The war games, though planned for the Bay of Bengal, were switched to the Arabian Sea this year. These collective signals were read by Admiral Fasi Bukhari, Chief of Naval Staff, PN. He is reported to have remarked that Pakistan's already 'badgered economy could be throttled in a war scenario

Although the Western Naval Fleet is adequate to deal with PN — force and capability ratio is seven to one in India's favour (see box) — the Eastern Naval Fleet was diverted to the west and placed under overall command of FOC-in-C Western Naval Command to deal with any maritime threat by Pakistan to India's strategic offshore assets. Surveillance by Tu-142 and Tu-138 maritime aircraft were stepped up.

As the aircraft carrier is in the wet docks for refitting, Virat-based Harriers had to operate from airfields onshore. From its forward deployed locations, IN was prepared to execute its operational



During the course of the Kargil conflict, Pakistan had tried to blackmail India with the nuclear threat. India's Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Sushil Kumar had responded that the Indian Navy was prepared to meet any threat including nuclear. The reference was to nuclear, biological and chemical defensive measures

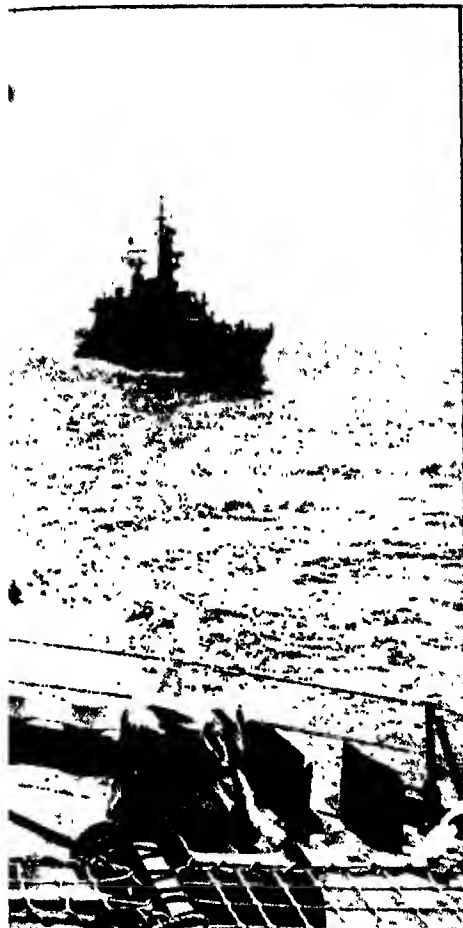
tasks — exercise maritime superiority, neutralise PN and carry out interdiction of sea lanes.

It is not well known that Pakistan's economic survival depends on its oil and trade flow over the sea lanes which are its lifelines.

Pakistan has just three oil refineries, the main ones at Karachi and Rawalpindi. While India has several state-owned tankers, Pakistan has merely one. Therefore, foreign-flag vessels have to be requisitioned by Pakistan. India enjoys

much greater autonomy in sea transit and transportation than Pakistan.

For Pakistan, the situation is made more vulnerable as there are only two ports — Karachi and Quasim — which can handle tankers. The strategic reserves of oil and petroleum storage capacity for civil and military usage is limited to seven days. India, on the other hand, has much larger reserves and storage capacity to handle civil and military need-based demands in a ratio of 15 to one. In Pakistan, the military and civil demand is a high of one to one. Nearly



COMPARATIVE STRENGTH OF NAVIES

TYPE	PAKISTAN	INDIA
AIRCRAFT CARRIER (INS Virat, Air Defence Ship Gorshykov & ATV projects)		1(1)
SUBMARINES	7 (2)	18(3)
FRIGATES	6(2)	12(6)
CORVETTES		23(4)
PATROL SHIPS		7
FAST ATTACK CRAFT	4(1)	7(4)
AMPHIBIOUS SHIPS/CRAFT		18
MINESWEEPERS/HUNTERS	3	18
FLEET SUPPORT/SURVEY	5	15
DESTROYERS	2	7(4)
PATROL CRAFT	2	7

(Figures in bracket indicate ships under construction)

80 per cent of Pakistan oil and petroleum products flow from the Gulf.

In operational terms, the Eastern Naval Fleet was deployed to cover Pakistani shipping lanes from the Gulf to its ports. PN flew its maritime aircraft and once the scale and span of deployment sank in, it went into a defensive mode, warning its vessels to steer clear of the IN. What's more, it began escorting its tankers destined for Karachi.

A Pakistani columnist writing for *The Saudi Gazette*, reported that the Indian Navy was poised to lay a naval blockade against Pakistan, if necessary to force withdrawal from Kargil. By lying in wait across Pakistan's soft underbelly with the combined might of both its fleet, the Indian Navy was all keyed up to strike, had the conflict spilled beyond Kargil. Springing a naval blockade like the Cuban blockade in 1962 is an act of war.

Deciphering a war-like act on the high seas is extremely complex business. Although the navy enjoys extreme flexibility and versatility, the Rules of

Engagement (RoE) have to be interpreted with great sensitivity and despatch. The RoE was cleared by the Cabinet Committee for Security.

The rapid deployment of maritime resources including the Coast Guard had multiple spin-offs: deterred Pakistan from escalating the conflict and augmented the strategic pressure point of the air-land campaign. But what was most worrying for Pakistan was the threat of a naval blockade.

What else did the silent service do? It flew over Kargil its ECM and ECCM (Electronic Warfare-fitted) Dornier aircraft in support of the campaign besides providing several teams of marine commandos. Some of these commandos have been operating on the Wullar lake in Srinagar for quite some time now.

For the PN, the strategic warning at sea was clear: do not escalate, climb down Kargil. There are immediate and long-term lessons from the navy's preventive deployment in the high seas. It has reinforced Pakistan's vulnerability to interdiction of its sea lanes and a blockade of Karachi. The need to modernise IN's sea denial and domination

capability stands out.

During the course of the Kargil conflict, Pakistan had tried to blackmail India with the nuclear threat. Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Sushil Isaacs had responded that IN was prepared to meet any threat including nuclear. The reference was to nuclear, biological and chemical defensive measures. The nuclear profile of the IN will manifest once the Advanced Technology Vehicle (ATV) project is fully restored. An assured second-strike capability for India's minimum nuclear deterrent rests with the future of the ATV project.

A key lesson from the navy's strategic role in the Arabian Sea which helped defeat the aggression in Kargil is that despite the Bhagwat episode, the IN is back to being a professional force with high morale.

By contrast, the Pakistan Navy has been advised by *The Dawn* columnist, Ayaz Amir, to provide its best naval cruiser so that all the models of Shaheen and Ghauri missiles can be packed on board and dumped into the waters of the Arabian Sea. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

Looms the ISI's long knife

In The Sh

By exposing the involvement of Pakistani regulars in the Kargil conflict, India did score many points on the diplomatic front. But it would be grossly inadequate to stop here. This clandestine strategy poses a new threat to the country's security. A few questions arise — when did the Pakistani Army assume the role of a militant from one of an abettor? How does this fit with the role of defending the nation and Pakistan's larger gameplan of liberating Kashmir?

Initially the army took the intrusions to be an extension of Operation Topak in which the Pakistan Army was to play a back-up role. Later, it was confirmed the so-called Mujahideen were regulars. The flip-flop continued till the regulars took off their Mujahideen mask.

Investigations by SUNDAY have established a nexus between regulars and the militant groups. It was the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) which engineered participation of regulars. In an earlier story SUNDAY (11-17 July) explored the role of ISI behind the rise of militant groups operating in Kashmir. Now we have discovered that ISI has created from within the Pakistani Army, a Pakistan Special Force (PSF) who wear Indian Army uniforms and are meant to aid the Kashmiri militants in contrived crisis.

Significantly, PSF forms the core of a mixed force (soldiers of the Northern Light Infantry (NLI), Chitral Scouts and militants) created by ISI to acquire what they term, 'a forward strategic depth' in Kashmir. According to a military intelligence document, this force was raised in 1997, after the efforts to create a puppet regime called, Islamic Confederation of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Kashmir (PAK) by year 2000 seemingly failed. Since then, as the document alludes the objectives were two-fold.

- To establish a Taliban-dominated broad-based government, acceptable to the global community.
- Intensify insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir by supplying heavier weapons to the mercenaries to inflict maximum casualties on the Indian Army.



Afghan mercenaries: fomenting trouble in the Valley

This was a shift from the pre-1997 strategy of Pakistan which sought to pursue simultaneously an insurgency campaign in Afghanistan and Kashmir. While the Taliban gained areas quickly in Afghanistan, militants in Kashmir were checked effectively by the Indian Army. Thus Pakistan realised a need to drive a wedge into Indian territory and infiltrate it with Afghan militants.

In fact, in a paper presented by the former Pakistan Army Chief, General Aslam Beg at a conference on Asian security, early this year in New Delhi mentioned: "Afghanistan war of liberation experience provided strength for the Kashmiri freedom fighter in the wider dimension of conflict...should peace come to Afghanistan, the Mujahideen would like to repay the gratitude to their Kashmiri brothers for joining them in their struggle against the Soviet aggressor."

In the post 1997 scenario, the ISI has assumed a greater role than the Pakistani military. Other than the PSF, it has created a Jaanbaaz Mujahideen Force (JMF), again comprising Pakistan Army personnel to train militants of the Hizh-i-Islam group operating inside Kashmir. The only political outfit with which the ISI seeks help for its cadres is the Jamaat-e-Islami.

From making terrorists out of local Kashmiris, to exporting terrorism has led to establishment of many more training camps within Pakistan. A confidential report prepared by the Deputy Commissioner of Sheikhupura on behalf of the Government of Pakistan has confirmed the presence of 87 such camps in the country. Of these, 49 were reportedly located in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK).

These camps are not Kashmir-specific. A new plan called the K-2 pro-

Shadow Of War



THE ISI-RUN TRAINING CAMPS IN PAKISTAN



The dark dots show the location of the camps.

In the post-1997 scenario, the ISI has assumed a greater role than the Pakistani military. Other than the PSF, it has created a Jaanbaaz Mujahideen Force, again comprising Pakistan Army personnel to train militants of the Hizb-ul-Islam group operating inside Kashmir

programme was devised by the ISI. This programme details the plan to export terrorism into the north-east and subsequently the hinterland (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh). For this, Pakistan has also been collaborating with the mafia in Bhutan and Nepal to establish more camps.

In these camps, potential terrorists are organised into smaller bands called *tanzeems*. They are put through rigor-

ous training under the PSF and the JMF. Each *tanzeem* is mission specific and they aren't simply trained to spread terror but are linked to a greater intent of capturing territory. According to intelligence reports, there are 2,300 hardcore terrorists in J&K of which 900 are foreign mercenaries. These mercenaries are not only from Afghanistan but also from Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Iran and Iraq.

Intelligence reports suggest that the

ISI has stopped hobnobbing with every radical group in Kashmir. "It has burnt its fingers once with the JKLF," said a senior intelligence official. The Harkatul-Ansar, Al-Badr, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen are some of these groups. Elaborating on the point, the official told SUNDAY, "The one person common to all these groups is Osama Bin Laden, which is why the United States is so Indian in its response."

By winning back Kargil and pushing back the intruders, the Indian troops have warded off the danger for the moment. But the threat is still intact. Fortunately, the US interest in the growing threat has been rekindled on two accounts: possibility of a larger trans-border conflict fuelling a nuclear flashpoint and the prospect of a menacing cross-border terrorism on a daily basis. •

Pranab Dhal Samanta/New Delhi

Shame!

It is time politicians stopped behaving like the Mujahideen on the LoC

The politicisation of Kargil was inevitable. What was, however, avoidable was dragging the armed forces on to centre-stage. Whether it was the nuclear tests, the formation of the National Security Council or the dismissal of Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, these events of the last 18 months have been used to denigrate rather than strengthen national security. Reason? Every political party indulges in competitive patriotism verging on jingoism with an eye on its political score-card. Kargil has clearly illustrated this political hallmark.

While Op Vijay was still on, the Congress party committed a grave breach of national security by trying to inveigle classified documents out of a serving Brigadier, Surinder Singh, until recently in command of the Kargil brigade, now transferred as Deputy GoC 23 Mountain Division at Ranchi in Eastern Command. The Congress party spokesperson, the cerebral advocate Kapil Sibal, has committed the greater crime of politicising the armed forces, even some are saying, of encouraging senior officers to give away sensitive Op-related information as was done in the case of Admiral Bhagwat.

This is not the first time Sibal has done this. Earlier this year, the dismissed Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, another disaffected officer, had been made to hand over to Sibal, an affidavit with which the Congress whipped the government. In fact, the real victim was the Indian Navy. The rest is history. The Congress has done a Bhagwat on the army through Surinder Singh.

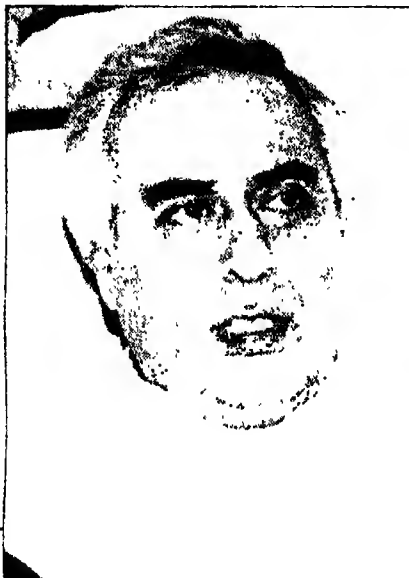
Even while Kargil was being fought on the high mountains by the *jawans*, it was the Congress which kept sniping at the government, encouraging the media in erroneously implicating the Chief of Army Staff, Gen V.P. Malik for organising and attending operational briefings for the ruling party. Malik had to issue a belated denial. It was not mentioned that

a similar briefing was held for the Opposition parties as well. About the outcome of the Kargil war, Sibal is credited with this stunning contradiction: "It was a great victory for the *jawan* and a great failure for the BJP government."

From Day One of Op Vijay, the Congress has tried to draw a divide and distinction between the government of the day and the army. It kept saying while it would support the army it would be free to criticise the government which it did. This created unnecessary confusion in the rank and file of the army forcing the military high command into retorting: "But we take our orders from this very government." The army chief was particularly unhappy that these irresponsible statements were being made when he was fighting a war on the borders.

Further, the personal attacks on defence minister George Fernandes were as savage as our soldiers attacking Toling. The timing and content of these

Kapil Sibal: "It was a great victory for the *jawan* and a great failure for the BJP government"



Indian troops at Kargil: there is no need to politicise the armed forces

assaults on the defence minister were ill-advised and bad for morale of the *jawans* and field commanders. People forget the defence minister through the Cabinet is accountable to the armed forces. His fault was to say safe passage could be considered when the time came. This is what happened. His fault was to say infiltrators would be pushed back in 48 hours. That is what senior army commanders told him then. He had the grace not to mention their names at that time. His fault was, he visited Kargil half a dozen times. Fernandes does not have to prove his loyalty. It is for those who oppose him, to do so.

This attempt to sour civil-military relations, tendency to political meddling and specific interference in the case of Brig. Surinder Singh, of 121 Infantry Brigade at Kargil has hurt defence and national security as much as sully the apolitical nature of the armed forces.

These deliberate jibes at the government undermine not only the politico-military, but also the purely, highly sanctified military chain of command. Most commentators had imposed a voluntary ban on nitpicking the cause and conduct of the campaign while it was being



waged. The LoC has only just been fully restored, but the army has had to fight on two fronts — at Kargil and in Delhi.

The government has ordered a broad-based review of events leading to Kargil and how to prevent their recurrence elsewhere. Sibal has claimed that the Vajpayee government had been warned by an operational army commander (Surinder Singh) as early as August 1998, about enhanced threat perception. This is pure fiction.

It is a great pity Surinder Singh, like Bhagwat before him, is being exploited so that Congress can extract its pound of flesh from Kargil. He will be depicted as the martyr, the Indian Army's scapegoat, much like the manner in which Pakistan Army has used the Northern Light Infantry regiment of all its infantry regiments as the sacrificial goat in Kargil.

The Surinder Singh episode should never have come up. Unfortunately, a story in the media about command failure and warnings by Surinder Singh is 90 per cent the result of hack journalists who do not understand military and operational procedures. He was commanding the Kargil brigade when intrusions took place. Three weeks after battle was joined he was relieved of his command by the army chief for operational reasons on the recommendations of the divisional and corps commanders — Major

General V.S. Badhwar and Lt-Gen Kishan Pal.

The evidence claimed by Sibal and the media is based on the Brigadier's Redressal of Grievance (RoG) dated 28 June 1999 addressed to Gen. Malik. Singh has complained his removal from Kargil was unjustified and he has attached 26 letters to substantiate his case. The army has ordered an enquiry on how con-

George Fernandes: unnecessarily attacked



fidential documents came to be made public. The Northern Army Command responsible for J&K had initiated its own high-level investigation headed by a lieutenant-general to probe the intrusions much before the central enquiry was ordered two days ago.

Some facts on Surinder Singh are essential. He had lost the confidence of his immediate superior officers, GoCs 3 Mountain Division and 15 Corps. By his own admission he had serious professional differences with GoC 3 Mountain Div. Similarly, differences are documented with one of his subordinates, Commanding Officer, 16 Grenadiers. On top of this, he had a medical problem, a perforated eardrum. The removal of a brigade commander during a war has serious implications. It does not mean that others in the chain of command are not culpable. They will also be investigated as part of the After Action Report.

Due to operational reasons, Malik was forced to appoint a new brigade commander, Brig Nandrajog, to instil confidence in a demoralised brigade. Surinder Singh, a thrice decorated soldier, has allowed himself to be drawn into a political trap on the assurance that he is in legally good hands and that no harm would come to him. This is bound to encourage other officers to flock to political parties when they have an RoG.

The services community is unlikely to buy his side of the story — about his intuition of enhanced threat perception in Kargil and the need for remotely piloted vehicles or a defence satellite (however much these may be required) when none exists on the inventory.

But the chattering classes on the cocktail circuit will lap it up, reliving the Bhagwat days. Similarly sensitive operational material relating to the LoC may have fallen into the wrong hands. Very sad, even the armed forces, one of the pillars of Indian democracy, are being exploited for narrow political gains which are inimical to larger national interests.

The simple lesson from Kargil for politicians is not to meddle with the armed forces by trivialising a war-like situation. The great victory of the *jawans* is being portrayed as a failure. It is time politicians stopped behaving like the Mujahideen on the LoC. •

(The author was a general officer commanding of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in Southern Sri Lanka. He is the founder member of the Defence Planning Staff of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.)

The Maratha Cometh

But Sharad Pawar's cavalcade must cross Bhusawal before reaching Delhi

The estimates vary wildly. "Fifty is our number. If we can get 50 seats, we will be the ones to appoint the Prime Minister of India," says a supporter of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), predicting confidently that Sharad Pawar will win upwards of 23 Lok Sabha seats for the NCP from Maharashtra alone and will be able to form the next government in that state.

However, others are dismissive of this claim. Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Nirupam says: "I can't see Sharad Pawar getting more than eight Lok Sabha seats, the bulk of them from western Maharashtra." Nirupam doesn't consider Pawar a challenge worth mentioning in the Assembly elections.

Sharad Pawar is many things to many people. For the Maharashtrians, he is the only hope of Maharashtra ever ruling Delhi. The first time the state had such aspirations, it met a bloody end: in the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761 when the imperialist Peshwas tried to conquer Delhi but were massacred by the forces of Ahmad Shah Abdali.

To Sonia Gandhi, he is the only way she can validate her leadership of the Congress. He represents the challenge:



so he has to be decimated.

To the BJP, he is what stands between their political recovery and a total rout in the state.

To his party, the Nationalist Congress Party, he represents the Hope of the Millennium — they believe that if the Congress is defeated and Sonia Gandhi driven out in the next election, it is they who



"We would be only too happy if Sharad Pawar does in 1999 what he did in 1996 — unite the Opposition to us," says Pramod Mahajan

will re-enter and capture the Congress.

So Sharad Pawar represents what the Sensitive Index has come to dread: the Bull. Will he be able to push up his net worth in the coming elections?

What is new about the electoral exercise of 1999? First, the last time Maharashtra had Assembly and Lok



Sharad Pawar is many things to many people. For Maharashtrians, he's the only hope of Maharashtra ever ruling Delhi. To Sonia Gandhi, he represents challenge. To the BJP, he is what stands between their political recovery and a total rout in the state. To his party, he represents the Hope of the Millennium

Sabha elections together was in 1967, i.e. 32 years ago. In political terms, Pawar was only a small boy then. In fact, there is hardly anyone in the state who remembers the political details and implications of having a Lok Sabha and an Assembly election together.

So this is the first imponderable Pawar faces. Why only Pawar, all the political parties face this problem.

The second is related to the first. This is the first time the BJP has a choice of allies. Earlier, either the BJP has fought in coalition with the Opposition when Sharad Pawar was in the Opposition (1985) or against him (1990). But the BJP has never been in the fortuitous situation of being able to choose allies — as it is today, having the option of

dropping the Shiv Sena in preference for Pawar.

Both these make this election in Maharashtra a unique event and tell us more about the leadership and mobilising strategies of all political parties, especially after having an intruder in their midst.

In realistic terms, how has the Congress been affected by the 'betrayal' of Sharad Pawar? In numerical terms, badly. Sixty to 70 per cent of the Congress cadre and leaders have joined Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party. And there's no denying that there is a vertical split in the party structure.

But is this in itself enough to create a divide in the state? BJP leaders are fervently hoping it is. For there is no doubt that, while the structure has been dented,

the Congress's social — and political — base continues to be intact. The Muslims are still on Sonia Gandhi's side, supporting the 'real' Congress. So are the Dalits. If Sharad Pawar can break into this combination and split it, victory is the BJP's. There is evidence that he is trying to, by wooing Ramdas Athavale of the Republican Party of India (RPI) and by forging an alliance with Mulayam Singh Yadav, the two individuals who led him — and the Congress — to victory in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. The Congress had 37 seats from Maharashtra then and Pawar was still in the Congress.

"We would be only too happy if Sharad Pawar does in 1999 what he did in 1996 — unite the Opposition to us,"



"I can't see Sharad Pawar getting more than eight Lok Sabha seats, the bulk of them from western Maharashtra," says Sena MP Sanjay Nirupam

says Pramod Mahajan, BJP boss in Maharashtra, with a grin. He says the BJP/Shiv Sena may have to part with a few seats to make space for the Sharad effect, but in a cost-benefit analysis, the price is well worth paying because it will divide the 'secular' vote while uniting the BJP's.

So the BJP's policy towards Sharad Pawar is to help him, love him and leave him — after the elections by which time he would have served his purpose of destroying things for the Congress.

Those who predicted that the Congress in Maharashtra was finished after Sharad Pawar jumped ship, may be in for a surprise. The Congress's clout may have reduced, but by no means is it wiped out from the state.

In fact, look at the times the Congress has contested elections without Sharad Pawar: its performance has been much better than when Pawar has been leading it.

In 1978, Sharad Pawar became the youngest chief minister of Maharashtra by stabbing his mentor Y.B. Chavan in the back, and in 1980, tried his luck for the first time. His men won 50 seats, but it was A.R. Antulay who became chief minister, so Pawar was left with just five or so men. In 1985, he contested the election again, with the entire Opposition.

Free Movements

The polls are near — it's season of migration once more

On 24 July, five Independent ministers resigned from the Narayan Rane-headed Shiv Sena-BJP government in Maharashtra. However, Rane, not one to admit anything that resembles loss of credibility, shot back saying that he had asked them to resign. He had lost confidence in them, he said.

On 25 July, these Independent ministers joined Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party.

On 26 July, in a quick damage-control exercise, the combine government garnered the support of 11 Independent legislators, including four ministers. And they claim that they have also won the support of four other Independents. In return, the alliance wouldn't field candidates in their constituencies.

The developments, however, have left Chhagan Bhujbal, the NCP state chief, unperturbed. Bhujbal claims that 30 out of 45 Independents would ultimately join his party. Indeed, for the moment at least, the wind seems to be blowing in favour of the newly-formed NCP. Political pundits agree that the Nationalist Congress Party's claim of getting 30 Independents into their party fold is no idle boast. Even the Independents who joined Pawar's outfit admit that the NCP is better placed than the Sena-BJP alliance. Says Anil Deshmukh, former minister of state for education and also the leader of the Independents: "Joining the NCP seemed the most logical thing to do under the circumstances."

The circumstances, of course, are that the non-performing and corrupt Sena-BJP alliance has lost all its goodwill among the people. "Even the 11 Independents who have agreed to support the alliance feel so," claims Bhujbal. "They would be contesting the elections in their individual capacity; they are not confident of fighting the election on a Sena-BJP ticket. On the other hand, the five who have joined our party have full faith in the party's victory in the polls." As a political analyst points out, "The Independents seem to have realised that by supporting the alliance they are, in fact, backing a sinking ship. A few have already fled. Others are in the process of doing so. Otherwise, which minister who is assured of a Cabinet post in the next government would want to leave?"

It's a valid, logical point, but one which the Sena and BJP leaders are not willing to concede. According to them, it's only natural for the Independents to ally with Pawar who had backed their candidature in the 1995 Assembly polls when the Congress had denied them tickets. "But that does not indicate



Suresh Kalmadi is camping in Pawar's constituency to select or at least shortlist the man who can take on the NCP chief

Chhagan Bhujbal says that 30 out of 45 Independents would ultimately join the NCP



that they are deserting us because they are convinced of our defeat in the polls," says a Sena MP.

Besides the Independents, the BJP has also lost three influential Adivasi leaders: former MP Rajabhai Thakre and former ministers Govindrao Chaudhary and A.T. Pawar to the NCP. Then, Bal Thackeray's two heirs — Uddhav and Raj — are at loggerheads with each other. The signal such rifts send down to the lower levels is negative, to say the least.

Even within the alliance, the Sena, which has often acted as the big brother, has completely toned down its bullying. The reason, inform analysts, is simple: the BJP has a better performance-sheet and, this time around, the Sena will have to piggy ride on the BJP's back to win the elections. In fact, one of the reasons for Sena boss Bal Thackeray's reluctance to hold simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections was that with bigger national issues fresh in public memory, the BJP would definitely have an edge after the Kargil victory.

Thackeray, say Maharashtra-watchers, relented only because he reasoned that Pawar, who enjoys tremendous support in Marathawada and western Maharashtra, might seek an alliance with the BJP after the Lok Sabha polls and, ultimately, the Assembly elections, leaving the Sena high and dry.

Meanwhile, in the triangular contest in the state, the Maratha strongman has succeeded in pulling off alliances with the Third Front parties — the Janata Party, the Peasants' Workers Party and the Samajwadi Party. Already, 45 of the total 77 Congress legislators have declared their support. The NCP has also managed to get the support of the influential Ganesh Naik, a former Sena rebel.

Ramdas Athavale, the Republican Party of India (RPI) chief, has also said he would back the Maratha leader. Athavale claims that at their recently-held central executive committee meeting in New Delhi, 31 of the 51 members chose to align with the NCP. At the state level, 19 out of 43 executive committee members opted to join forces with the NCP. The split within the faction-ridden RPI now remains only a formality with three important leaders — Prakash Ambedkar, Jogendra Kawade and R.S. Gavai — not wanting to go along with the party's executive committee decision.

State Congress leaders, meanwhile, insist that the switch-over of the Independent legislators to the rival camp is unlikely to have much of an impact on the party's poll prospects. Right now, they are busy with an amusing game of possible one-upmanship over Pawar. Friends-turned-foes of the Maratha leader, Suresh Kalmadi and Govindrao Adik, are camping in Pawar's constituency, Baramati and its adjoining areas, to select or, at least, shortlist the man who can take on the NCP chief on a Congress symbol.

With the polls drawing nearer, pundits claim that a clear picture of a post-election scenario is gradually emerging. At stake are 289 Assembly and 48 Lok Sabha seats. "At present, it appears that no single party may secure a clear-cut majority, but Pawar's NCP may lead the total tally," predicts an analyst. The Congress may sweep the Vidharha region while the Konkan coast will be shared between the Sena and the NCP. •

Kanjal Wadia/Bombay

He couldn't cross 50 MLAs and Shivaji-rao Patil Nilangekar became chief minister, i.e. the Congress coasted to victory.

And when he did rejoin the Congress and worked for its victory, in 1995, the Congress wrested defeat from the jaws of victory: the party couldn't form a government in the state because too many Independents were opposed to Sharad Pawar.

What does all this say about Sharad Pawar? Over the years, many verdicts



Thackeray didn't want simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. He felt that after Kargil the BJP would have an edge over the Sena. He relented when he realised that, after the polls, Pawar could ally with the BJP

have been passed on him, that he's in too much of a hurry (in 1991, that's what P.V. Narasimha Rao told him when he threw his hat in the ring with India's venerable old Chanakya for the top job); that his campaigns are always too shrill and loud (in 1988-89, that's what older Congressmen told him when he tried to fly the flag of rebellion against Rajiv Gandhi).

So the BJP's conclusion is: so long as Sharad Pawar is the *woh*, he's fine. It's when he tries to become *pati* or *patni* that you have to watch out. •

Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi

Three fronts emerge in Tamil Nadu on the eve of the Lok Sabha elections

The wheel has come full circle. Those in opposite camps in the 1998 Lok Sabha polls have come together while some have drifted away to form a new front. The electoral alliances in Tamil Nadu have firmed up on expected lines.

The DMK was first off the block by hitching its electoral wagon to the BJP and stringing together the AIADMK's other erstwhile allies like the PMK, MDMK, and the TRC. While the AIADMK has once again warmed up to the Congress and also included the two prominent Left parties — the CPI(M) and the CPI. And the one that could not be fitted in, the TMC, has formed a third front along with Pudhiya Tamilagam (PT).

DMK leader and former Union minister Murasoli Maran sought to drive home that compulsions of a federal polity to shun political untouchability was as much a factor as the Congress's autocratic attitude vis-a-vis regional parties in the DMK's decision to be part of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance.

Said Maran, "While the BJP understood the DMK's concern, the Congress's attitude on the other hand smacked of sheer arrogance, it refused to even look at anybody. So we refused to fall at the Congress's feet." In fact, it was Maran who has excellent rapport with Prime Minister Vajpayee, who was instrumental in forging the party's alliance with the BJP.

Some old-timers in the DMK have reservations about the alliance but there was hardly any resistance from the cadres once the decision was explained to them. There was a fear among DMK sympathisers whether the party would roll back on its rationalist and secularist ideology. And most important was the impact it would have on the DMK's much-nurtured minority vote-bank. Even its most bitter foes admit in private that Muthuvel Karunanidhi is the last of the true secular political leaders left in the country.

But partymen were tutored on why the DMK had to have an alliance with

EXPECTED



"More than a year back we had certain reservations about the BJP. But now they have turned over a new leaf and as long as DMK is in the NDA they will safeguard the interest of the minorities," said Karunanidhi

the BJP. Karunanidhi explained to them at the general council meeting that Vajpayee was a "gentleman-politician". He made great efforts to resolve the tangle over the Cauvery tribunal's interim award.

And above all, due to the DMK's influence, the BJP has shed its pro-Hindutva image. Said Karunanidhi at a church meet: "More than a year back we had certain reservations about the BJP. But now they have turned over a new leaf and as long as DMK is in the NDA, they will safeguard the interest of the minorities."

The Kargil conflict also came in handy for the DMK in projecting Vajpayee as the prime ministerial candidate. The new slogan on Vajpayee also

ALLIANCES



Jayalalitha: betting on Sonia

seems to be working: "A bold, efficient and a good Prime Minister." Karunanidhi's speech at the chief ministers' conference in New Delhi on Kargil totally

Chidambaram: aiming far



identified itself with the BJP on national security issues and found a new campaign theme — nationalism, democracy and secularism.

The basic idea was that the tie-up has a lot to do with Vajpayee's "leadership" and "towering image" and little to do with the BJP's communal philosophy. However, there are clear indications that the DMK may overcome the negative impact of the alliance (loss of Muslim votes) by the sheer number of allies it has strung together like the PMK and MDMK who have pockets of influence, where they can bring in the votes.

But nobody is writing off the AIADMK-led front which presents itself as the secular alternative. The AIADMK and its leader Jayalalitha have been magnanimous to the Congress by gifting it 12 seats. Remember in the 1998 polls when the Congress contested alone, its candidates lost their

deposits in all the 39 seats.

Today, Congressmen are complaining that most of the dozen seats they received from Jayalalitha are not worth contesting but with the inclusion of the Left parties, it signals the emergence of a broad secular front that can pose a formidable challenge to the BJP-DMK combine.

The major negative factor against the AIADMK front is that Jayalalitha is perceived as being corrupt and the speed with which the special courts are framing charges against her makes an alliance with her party risky.

Jayalalitha faces trial in five corruption cases in the special courts and her

"Whatever be the arguments for and against coalition politics, the country is in for an era of coalition," said Jayalalitha, clarifying that the AIADMK made no demand on joining the government if the Congress wins

detractors are determined to see that she is barred from contesting. The other factor that makes her a liability is that she is accused of bringing down the BJP government and foisting an unwanted election. In fact, her *bete noire*, superstar Rajnikant has warned that the AIADMK should be punished for forcing another mid-term poll by pulling down the Vajpayee government.

But what normally works in her favour especially among the rural electorate is the image that she spins out — a woman persecuted by the male chauvinist DMK-led alliance and her new love for the Muslims. Recently at a public meeting organised by the Tamil Muslim

FADING OUT

Rajnikant and Swamy are no longer in the scene

While the hero of Tamil Nadu politics and superstar Rajnikant was cheered vociferously, Subramanian Swamy, the villain, was not only jeered at but ended up with egg on his face.

Swamy, the flip-flop man of Tamil politics, has once again fallen foul of Jayalalitha whom he ganged up with after a fierce legal battle during her tenure as chief minister.

When Vajpayee refused to make him finance minister, Swamy worked on Jayalalitha and finally succeeded in bringing down the BJP government when the lady withdrew support following Swamy's famous tea party in April '99 where Jaya and Sonia met.

But Swamy failed to wangle a Congress-led government and Jayalalitha was peeved with him. However, it was Sasikala who is said to have poisoned Jayalalitha against Swamy. So when Jayalalitha announced seat sharing among her alliance partners, Swamy was not surprisingly left out. "Jayalalitha was not her own person. She is being controlled by Sasikala's coterie," fumed Swamy, adding, "Jayalalitha has no concept of loyalty or gratitude."

Now, Swamy is contesting as a Janata Party candidate without the support of any mainstream political

Subramanian Swamy: dumped by Jayalalitha



party. And Jayalalitha's final word on Swamy, "It is good riddance to bad rubbish."

But Rajnikant has hit Jayalalitha where it hurts most. He has decided to stay away from politics. On the eve of the 1996 Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, he had thundered, "Even God cannot save Tamil Nadu if Jayalalitha returns to power." His clarion call was responsible for her rout and his support to the TMC-DMK combine saw them ride to power. But in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, his magic did not work as his heart had always been with the BJP.

So, on the eve of the 1999 polls with his local mentors Karunanidhi and Moopanar in opposite camps, he called a press conference to say that he would not support any party as the combination which he helped — the DMK-TMC alliance — no longer existed.

Indicating his opposition to the AIADMK-led front in Tamil Nadu, he warned, "Those who were responsible for the coming Lok Sabha elections should be punished since frequent elections are not good for the country." Rajnikant has also urged political parties not to use his name or photograph in any publicity material during the campaign.

Munnetra Kazhagam she promised that she would never have any alliance with the BJP in future.

Jayalalitha also declared that she had no "problems" in projecting Congress president Sonia Gandhi as the next

Rajnikant has warned that the AIADMK should be punished for forcing another mid-term poll by pulling down the Vajpayee government

Prime Minister. She is also willing to address joint campaign meetings with Sonia. However, she hinted that she was keen on joining the government at the Centre if the Congress could cobble up a majority.

Said Jayalalitha: "Whatever be the arguments for and against coalition politics, the country is in for an era of coalition." However, she clarified that the AIADMK made no demand on joining the government if the Congress wins. The AIADMK front's calculation is that Jayalalitha will bring the Muslim and Sonia the Christian votes and the combination may click in at least 25 out of the 39 constituencies in the state.

Meanwhile, the alliance struck by the two major Dravidian parties have left the TMC with little political space to manoeuvre. TMC president G.K. Moopanar has taken a stand that it will steer clear of the "communalism" of the BJP and the "corruption" of the AIADMK.

The TMC has roped in the volatile PT into the third front and to a certain extent it can be the "spoiler" to both the other fronts' winning chances especially in the caste-ridden constituencies of southern Tamil Nadu where the PT is fast emerging as a militant outfit of the Dalits.

Former Union finance minister P. Chidambaram has said that the real aim of the TMC is not the 1999 Lok Sabha but to capture power in the 2001 state elections. •

Breedhar Pillai/Chennai



BJP leaders: the Kargil war is undoubtedly won; whether by the *jawans* or the government is the moot question

CTBT after the elections

Will India bend before insolent might?



of Pakis and Pak-backed mercenaries from occupying hundreds of square kilometres of Indian territory. The Budget, of course, went through the window trying to get the Pakis out, whatever Yashw-

The BJP set out to fight the elections on the three Bs Bomb, Bus, Budget. That came a cropper when the Bus landed up in Kargil and the Bomb did nothing to deter thousands

ant Sinha might say. A government as deeply into appeasement as his would not have had the fourth B — Brains — to have factored in the cost of a two-month war into its budgetary arithmetic. We do not really know what Kargil has cost the nation. The sums are still being calculated. But it is just about when voters start trekking to the polling stations that the economic impact of the war is going to start reaching into housewives' shopping bags.

The BJP have, therefore, opted out of the three Bs and into the three Ws: War, Wimbledon, Washington. They have,

they claim, won the War, won Wimbledon, and won Washington. The war is undoubtedly won. Whether by the *jawans* or the government is the moot question. The war, in any case, would not have been won if Rajiv Gandhi had been silly enough to listen to Jaswant Singh who, in August 1987, moved an amendment to the official JPC-Bofors resolution calling on the government to cancel the Bofors contract if Bofors did not disclose whom they had bribed to get the contract. Twelve years after Jaswant's amendment was contemptuously rejected, Bofors has saved the

day. Far from maintaining the suspension of the Bofors contract, operative since V.P. Singh had his five minutes of fame, Jaswant and his government have been compelled by the excellence of the Bofors gun to not only suspend the suspension but even renew the arrangements for the gun to be manufactured within the country. (And, yes, of course, before we move on to more germane matters, notwithstanding the suspension or restoration of the contracts, Bofors are still to add one tiny little syllable to what Rajiv Gandhi extracted from them — although non-Congress governments have ruled the roost for five of the last ten years.)

THE HYPE OVER driving out the intruders is now altering towards the questions agitating the public mind. Not who gets the credit for driving out the enemy but who gets the blame for letting him in, in the first place. A mountain of evidence, higher than Tiger Hill, is piling up that George Fernandes, Raksha Mantri, deliberately ignored information from the front and underplayed its significance with malafide intention. The charge of malafide is a serious one to make. But it is now clear that in August 1998, by the confession of the Raksha Mantri himself, in an answer to Parliament, information about intrusions in Kargil and Batalik was in the possession of the government. Why then did he choose to neglect the danger?

The answer is to be found in an apparently unrelated event, which took place the same month — the D.R. Manekar Memorial Lecture. George Fernandes had been invited to deliver the lecture and set about looking for the book that keeps Manekar's memory alive *The Guilty Men Of 1962*. On doing so, George discovered it to be out of print. He, therefore, urged that a new edition be printed. Penguin obliged, inviting George to write the foreword. In his foreword, George described "the danger to our security from Pakistan" as a "myth", a myth, moreover, which had been "exploded" by our nuclear bomb.

Brig. Surinder Singh's report from Kargil, in the same month of August, about intrusions and preparations for more massive intrusions thus landed on the minister's table at a most inconvenient time. Here he was describing the danger from Pakistan as a myth — and out there in the boondocks was some lunatic Brigadier suggesting that, perhaps, the danger from Pakistan was at an all-time

high. So, little Georgie-Porgie decided to give the obstreperous Brigadier the old brush-off. No action was taken on the report, the Raksha Mantri having ensured that anyone who held any views contrary to his would receive the Vishnu Bhagwat treatment.

It is not just that George has absorbed all that has been taught him by his social-

Bomb having enabled the Pakis to pull their Bomb out of the basement, making the headcount of nuclear *Tees Maar Khans* on the subcontinent not one but two. Ideologically, however, and whatever the facts on the ground, the country was burdened with a defence minister who believed, in his own dulcet words, that the Indian Bomb had "exploded"



1st international pals about the danger being from China, all other threats being myths, it is also that George, notwithstanding Vajpayee having cut him out of the loop on Pokhran-II, wanted a slice of that publicity cake too. Which is what led to the floating of the national security doctrine that since we are now a Bomb power, the Pakis dare not play footsie with us. The Brigadier's report indicated that far from being impressed with our Bomb, the Pakis were so impressed with theirs that they had decided the moment was ripe to launch yet another jihad. The infiltration in Kargil was the direct consequence of the Indian

the danger from Pakistan, a danger which was, in any case, mythical not real! Reason No. 2 for ignoring inconvenient Brigadiers.

IT WAS IN December that the next act of the drama opened. The RSS held their annual convention in Nagpur and lambasted Vajpayee. In quick succession, various fronts of the RSS joined the chorus. That was when Vajpayee called in his two house-boys from *India Today* — Prabhu Chawla and Swapan Dasgupta — and decided to listen to their advice. Which was to do the opposite of whatever Nagpur demanded. Since



George Fernandes: In August 1998, information about intrusions was in the possession of the government; why then did he choose to neglect the danger?

payee, was his opportunity of scoring the RSS and showing that he was someone to be reckoned with. The rest, as they say, is history. Vajpayee got on the bus; Sharif stuffed him with kebabs; lulled, our Man returned to Delhi, while Sharif took off to Kargil and other points north — to tell his men that now was the moment to strike.

Nothing, of course, was better suited to Georgie's purpose. Filled with socialist international bluster, our defence minister decided that if his PM wanted love with Pakistan, it was his duty as a patriot to suppress any unpleasant news from the front. So, the warnings of J&K's state intelligence were cast in the rubbish heap. Farooq Abdullah's rhetoric was fed into the shredder. Even a BSF report about a captured militant, Col. Shams of Al-Badr, having revealed what the Pakis were up to was sent into circulation. Intelligence from Gujjars and others wandering the frozen LoC were dumped at the very bottom of a dozen in-trays. No intelligence assessment was sought on the eve of the PM's "historic" journey to Pakistan. The trip was the vindication of George's ardent belief in the Bomb having "exploded" the "myth" of the "danger" to India from Pakistan. All might not be well. But he was going to make bloody sure all would seem to be well — and let national security go hang.

It is this that knocks out the first W. As for the second, Advani's attempt to pretend that he and Vajpayee are the Bhupathi and Paes of Indian politics has found no takers.

WHICH BRINGS US to the third W — Washington. George Fernandes, in his foreword, says Mankekar's book should be compulsory reading in all schools. Quite a thought. Except that Mankekar stops where the war stopped. He does not detail how the Americans discovered their best friends in India during that war. It is when India is at war that America sniffs out our Achilles heel. Soon after endowing us with their bounty in 1962, the Americans leaned on us (along with their poodle, our erstwhile imperial masters) to send to the subcontinent the Duncan Sandys-Averrel Harriman mission that bullied us into talks with Pakistan. Much like Clinton taking a wholly unsolicited "personal interest" in

our bilateral affairs and trying to wheedle an invitation out of us to visit the subcontinent. The objective is to make us talk and bring both of us to heel. The first is entirely unnecessary since we are both prepared to talk — albeit on our terms, not Washington's.

The second objective is more insidious. A report in *The Hindustan Times* (22 July) from N.C. Menon, their Washington correspondent, tells of Clinton underlining to Congress that signing the CTBT would have "constrained" India and Pakistan. That is the US objective: constrain us. Do we want to be constrained? By our own good sense, yes. But not at someone else's behest. Clin-



Bill Clinton: "We can maintain a safe and deliberate deterrent without nuclear tests." Of course, the US can. But can we?

ton gives the game away when he says, "We (that is, the US) have today a robust nuclear force." Uncle Sam sure has which is why he wants the CTBT. But do we have a robust nuclear force? Moreover, says, Clinton, "We can maintain a safe and deliberate deterrent without nuclear tests." Of course, the US can. But can we?

The US game is to inveigle us into signing a treaty that will confirm US dominance forever. They need India for that. The BJP was readying to sell us down the Potomac. The vote of 17 April put an end to that. Washington knows a return of the BJP to South Block will get them the CTBT signature they so ardently desire. The return of the Congress to South Block, on the other hand, will not get them a signature on the CTBT for nothing: they will have to engage in a process of negotiating a treaty for the time-bound elimination of nuclear weapons if India under the Congress is to sign the CTBT. The BJP does not understand that it is not New Delhi that has won Washington, but Washington that is winning New Delhi. Before the BJP commits as dangerous a diplomatic booby as the ride they were taken on to Pakistan, they must be stopped from climbing again the crest of Raisina Hill. •



The Kargil conflict: the infiltration was the direct consequence of the Indian Bomb having enabled the Pakis to pull their Bomb out of the basement

Panchajanya, the RSS-BJP house journal, was plaintively asking when we were going to take out the Pakis now that we had the Bomb. Vajpayee decided that the one way he could become his own man was by showing that he was for business with Pakistan. Just at this juncture, Nawaz Sharif threw out an off-the-cuff remark about Vajpayee being welcome to take the inaugural ride to Lahore, if he wished. Here, thought Vaj-

For a party that has been on both sides of the 'untouchability fence' for two decades, the formation of the National Democratic Alliance is indicative of a political turnaround. It is also an admission by the Bharatiya Janata Party that it needs to forge alliances in its pursuit of power. After five decades of existence in various avatars, the political wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh finally appears to have resolved the vexed issue of political untouchability.

This trait exhibited by the majority of political parties has been a recurring factor in Indian politics and even the Bharatiya Jana Sangh was not spared of it in the era when it played only a marginal role in Indian polity. The question of joining the SVD coalitions in several states in the late 1960s had been widely debated within the party and generated great acrimony. Even after the collapse of the SVD government, several sections within the Jana Sangh called for greater cohesion with other non-Congress parties. However, the party steered



An RSS shakha: felt let down by the BJP government

Step Aside, Big Brother

If the BJP wants to attract other parties, the RSS will have to take a back seat

clear of alliances that were forged because of electoral necessity, only to succumb in 1977 and agreed to the party's merger with the Janata Party. The BJP, carved out of the debris of the Janata experiment, was unequivocal in its position that given the 'precipitative role' played by the 'dual membership' issue in the collapse of the Morarji Desai government, the BJP would maintain a distinct identity and steer clear of any mergers in future.

Throughout the major period of late 1980s, when the BJP essentially remained a fringe party, it played a small yet significant role in cobbling together a front whose basic political thrust was anti-Congressism. At least on two occasions — in the early 1980s when Indira Gandhi was in power and during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure — there were attempts to form another 'mother of all anti-Congress' party by merging various parties. While the initiative of Charan Singh remained nascent, V.P. Singh's initiative took the shape of Janata Dal. But, the BJP took a principled position against merger with the new party and instead opted to forge an electoral 'understanding'. This policy was singularly responsible for the quantum jump of the BJP in the 1989 elections when the party registered its unprecedented 2-to-88 growth in the Lok Sabha amid the spectacle of the 'Indian Right' and the communists being part of

the anti-Congress front

The 1980s ended on a note of satisfaction for the BJP, it had overcome its 'untouchable tag' and besides supporting a centrist coalition of sorts at the Centre, it was part of a coalition government in Haryana. Spurred by the growing public discord against the Rajiv Gandhi government, the BJP also shed some of its inhibitions of aligning with another rag-tag anti-Congress front. The events in the late 1980s thus witnessed a dilution in the positions of both the non-BJP but anti-Congress parties and the BJP.

The Ayodhya issue that had started emerging as a central political agenda from 1986, when the locks of the disputed shrine were opened for Hindu devotees, was not considered significant by the non-BJP opposition parties in the run up to the 1989 polls. It however, became the main political agenda in the 'pre-Rajiv Gandhi assassination' phase of the 1991 elections. The BJP coined the phrase of 'going it alone' and sought to bask in the glory of being under spotlights on its own.

Though the party won only additional 40 Lok Sabha seats and was nowhere near securing a majority, the 1991 election was notable for the near nationwide spread that the BJP registered. The party polled a total of 20.8 per cent of popular vote but more significantly, the BJP fielded candidates from



468 constituencies. This was nearly double the figure of 191 that the BJP fielded in 1989, while a part of the two-pronged alliance with the JD and the communists. The results of the 1991 election led to the coming of the phrase that the BJP was a 'government in waiting' and there was near unanimity in the media that the 'victor came second'.

More significant however, was the BJP's 'splendid isolation' from other non-Congress parties which had, by then, realised the possibility of the BJP's emergence as the only national alternative to the Congress. The events in the initial years of Narasimha Rao's tenure were marked by total isolation of the BJP from Opposition politics. On its part, the BJP also made little effort to find any allies and pursued aggressive programmes on issues ranging from Ayodhya to Kashmir and Uniform Civil Code.

The BJP's isolation grew following the demolition of the Babri Masjid and only a concerted effort by significant sections within the Sangh Parivar enabled it to find allies on non-political issues like the Dunkel Draft. The success of Sangh Parivar affiliates like the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh in drawing elements from outside the RSS fold corresponded with the unfolding of the Havala scan-

It was not an impromptu overreaction of a war-weary general that led to Vajpayee's (right) crowning by Advani. The party's hard line had got too closely identified with Advani and no dilution in the party's ideological content was possible under his leadership

dal and L. K. Advani's subsequent withdrawal from the leadership race within the BJP. Coming as it did barely few months before the 1996 election, the BJP failed to fine-tune its new 'liberal' facade and thereby had to fight the polls without any significant alliances. It however, embarked on a major drive of forging new allies the moment it became clear that the 12th General Election was no longer avoidable. By the time the election was formally announced by the Election Commission, it had managed to sew most of its alliances in various states. The few that remained were done well before the campaign picked up and despite the fact that Jayalalitha caused a

hiccup or two, it was the same alliance that cobbled together a coalition after being invited by the President to form the government.

Elaborate though it is, a narration of the chain of events since the 1980s are particularly relevant as this is the period when some of the most decisive changes have taken place in Indian polity. For starters, the idea of an all-encompassing 'mother of all parties' that rules both at the Centre and in the majority of states does not appear as necessary as in the first four decades after Independence. Till the 1980s the USP of the Congress was the proverbial TINA factor: in other words, there was no other party with a base as representative as it had. Coupled with the failure of the Opposition to provide stable governments in the 1960s and the 1970s, this was singularly the most important reason for the success of the stability plank and nothing worked better in 1980 than Indira Gandhi's slogan: Elect a Government that Works.

The shift away from stable (read dominated by one authoritarian leader) parties with an all-India base being the sole claimants to power at the Centre began in effect from the early 1990s with the phased disintegration of the Janata Dal. Till the time when Messrs V.P. Singh & Co. formed the JD by incorporating disgruntled contemporary Congress leaders and the scattered vestiges of the Janata Party, there was an admission that to be a serious claimant to power at the Centre, the party needed to be 'another Congress'. But that changed as leaders left the JD periodically with each forming his own party with a limited regional base.

In many ways, the BJP questioned this by first refusing to merge with the new party and later chalking out an adventurist line during nocturnal meetings in the DCM Toyota LCV that redoubled as Advani's home during his nationwide sojourn in 1990. With the BJP's growth unabated in the 1991 election it was evident that the TINA factor was no longer making voters schizophrenic. As a result when the Janata Parivar started breaking down, faction leaders were not greatly perturbed at losing the tag of a 'national leader' and were instead with the identity of a 'regional chieftain'. This was the beginning of the much-vaunted political federalism at the level of political parties. The term *khichdi sarkar* suddenly found acceptability both in political circles and in the media as the inevitable coalition era that could provide as stable (policy-wise) a government as a one-party government could. Within a short span of time it was no longer politically embarrassing for H.D. Deve Gowda to step directly into South Block from Karnataka or for Inder Kumar Gujral to hop from IIC to Race Course Road. For that matter, it is no longer politically imprudent to consider Mulayam Singh Yadav as a potential PM, despite having barely a score with him inside Lok Sabha. True, that such instances had been witnessed earlier during the tenures of Charan Singh and Chandra Shekhar but both chapters had evoked moral indignation from the majority in the country. Stability thus need not only be measured by the government's longevity but can also be deduced by the consistency of various governments on the issue of economic liberalisation.

TTrue, that the BJP is no JD with just declining presence in states like Karnataka and Orissa. It also is no Sharad Pawar's NCP or Laloo Yadav's RJD with no claims of having even a marginal presence outside its area of strength. The BJP clearly has a more representative base and this was evident in the 1998 election when the party showed evidence of striking roots spread throughout the length and breadth of the country.



Advani's image took a beating following the failure to win the 'referendum on Ayodhya'

The party is no longer a clone of its earlier avatar that was restricted to just Hindi-speaking states where it was also limited primarily to urban centres with support primarily within the upper castes. However, it is equally true that the BJP is nowhere near being the Congress of yore.

Despite rapid growth in areas that were considered to be out of the BJP's ambit for long, there are still yawning gaps in the party's base. In the initial years of its march to power, the BJP made a concerted bid to emerge as a party with a nation-wide support base. But in the intervening years, the BJP has done quite a turnaround both in terms of being more accommodative towards other parties and also in admitting the limitations of the party support-base. With India on the threshold of another election, the BJP has, for the second time, forged another umbrella alliance that it is undoubtedly the 'mother of all alliances' today. The reasons for taking the lead in building such an alliance that has necessarily made the BJP compromise on key ideological and policy issues, stems from the realisation within the party on the changed nature of Indian polity. The developments also shall have a lasting impact on the political future of the nation, as it becomes incumbent on political parties to work with greater cohesion with each other.

The BJP's acceptance of the coalition theory, however, was preceded by a long period when it eschewed the idea of collaboration with other non-Congress parties. In ways more than one, this was a reaction to the manner in which centrist and left-of-Centre parties tried to isolate it in the build-up to the 1991 election. But, the BJP took its 'government in the waiting' image to heart and seriously believed that the party had



I.K. GUJRAL



DEVE GOWDA

In the 1990s, the term *khichdi sarkar* found acceptability. It was no longer politically embarrassing for Deve Gowda to step directly into South Block from Karnataka or for I.K. Gujral to hop from IIC to Race Course Road

the capacity to come to power on its own. This myth, however, was shattered in the 1993 elections in several state assemblies, when Advani's image took a beating following his failure to win the 'referendum on Ayodhya'.

It was thus evident that the BJP's isolationist policy would not take the party any further in its pursuit of power. But the problem was that the BJP was caught in a bind of abiding by its hard-nosed postures to retain the support of neo-converts and hard-liners alike. Moreover, by that time the party's hard line had got too closely identified with Advani and no dilution in the party's ideological content was possible under his leadership. Innerparty contradictions also played a crucial role at this stage in preventing the 'reinvention' of Vajpayee and thereby prepare ground for attracting potential allies by softening the hard line. This suggests that it was not an impromptu overreaction of a war-weary general that led to Vajpayee's crowning by Advani — as is widely projected within the Sangh Parivar. Rather, the decision was consciously taken with the intention of softening the Hindutva line of the party, in an attempt to prepare the ground for drawing allies to its fold. The decision has also to be seen as an admission by the BJP leadership that it could not become 'another Congress' and instead it would be more politically prudent for it to head a 'mother of all alliances'.

The BJP's emergence as one of the principal proponents of the coalition theory has not been without problems. Ironically however, the greater numbers of them were from within the RSS fraternity. Even after the failure of the BJP to muster any additional allies during the party's ill-conceived tenure in

1996, there was visible discomfort within the Sangh Parivar on attempts to forge a broad pre-election front. The discomfort stemmed from the decision to align with several state-level parties who were seen as the principal reason behind the BJP decision to dilute its ideological purity. Opposition to the alliance was however muted, as it also presented the chance of pitchforking the BJP into power.

The real problems within the BJP started after Vajpayee assumed office and the RSS presumed that the government would function as an extension of the Nagpur secretariat. From the time of government formation till the time Vajpayee lost the vote of confidence in April, he was acutely hamstrung — be it on the question of choice of Cabinet colleagues or on policy issues like the insurance sector to foreign companies. The crux of the problems between the Sangh and the government was that the cadre — and also certain sections of the RSS leadership — felt that though it was 'their government', it had done nothing to implement any of the original agenda of the Sangh Parivar. Vajpayee and his team sought cover under the argument of 'compulsions of coalition politics' but it cut very little ice with the bulk of the Sangh Parivar. In time it even isolated Advani from significant sections within the RSS, indicating that the RSS had not yet come to terms with the BJP attempt to abandon attempts to become the 'next Congress'.

By cementing the loose alliance after weeding out potential troublemakers, the BJP is now committed to the National Democratic Alliance. The commitment is necessary for the



The BJP's isolation grew following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992

BJP and this became first evident when the party took the lead in formulating the National Agenda for Governance. Later on, despite reservations within the Sangh Parivar, the government stuck to the paper despite its shallowness on issues regarding policy. The intention of the BJP-led coalition was unclear on several issues during its tenure. But it was evident that this was a government that was clear about what not to do: no Ayodhya, no Uniform Civil Code, no dramatic amendment to the Constitution and above all no real tampering with the social fabric.

Sharp utterances on key issues that had catapulted the BJP to its pre-eminent position — in other words, the real agenda of the RSS — were put on the backburner by the government. Both the party and government were circumspect about raising any issue that might have incensed its alliance partners. In fact, party leaders were prepared for resentment from within its ranks, but they were unwilling to risk the political isolation once again. It is true that attacks on Christians emerged as one of the major chapters of social discord during Vajpayee's tenure, but this was localised and not allowed to snowball into a nationwide issue despite a concerted campaign by the publications division of the Sangh Parivar. Even in its attack on Christians per se, the line of attack was shaped more with an eye on warding off the threat from Sonia Gandhi (with her Christian heritage).

There is little doubt that the more the NDA is strengthened — either on account of electoral compulsions or because of the genuine pressure emerging out of the inner dynamics of the Sangh Parivar — its distance from the ideological agenda of the Sangh Parivar would widen. The NDA is in the process of emerging as a Right-Centrist alliance with a 'nationalist' (read hawkish) foreign and defence policy that conveniently nosedives into the economic package created by the process of globalisation. Some concessions are likely to be made in

the social sector for electoral reasons and also because of the need to cater to the vote bank of various alliance partners. The BJP has little choice but to continue putting the interests of its allies before its own. Though finding it discomforting, the RSS leadership has little choice: it either forces the BJP to change tack and risk losing whatever little share of power it has, or it accepts the situation as it is and hopes that at least some of its policies are implemented by the government. It is indeed ironical that despite providing the mainframe of the NDA, the RSS finds itself perilously short of ideological endorsements. The RSS viewpoint these days is indeed guided by the preference for the proverbial bird in hand.

The NDA is unlikely to survive an electoral setback at the hands of a single party (read Congress) though if another hazy coalition succeeds it to power, the situation would be different. The return of single-party governance would indicate the voters' rejection of political federalism and would again push the BJP into proving that it had the capacity to become 'another Congress'. That would necessarily mean a return to the RSS agenda with social strife being one of the recurring factors. It is thus evident that the allies of the BJP can keep the best 'check' on the RSS agenda. Social harmony shall prevail only if the BJP is guided by the need to assuage junior partners and the imperatives of governance. But the NDA also faces the dangers of disintegrating in the event of the BJP deciding to force contentious issues as part of national consensus. That however would be primarily decided by the RSS and the nation would be spared many a hiccup if the monolith redefines its goals at the earliest. Poised to enter its 75th anniversary year shortly, there could be no better time for the RSS than this. The future of the NDA hinges on how much elbow room it is allowed. Clearly, Big Brother in Nagpur has to step aside. •

Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay/New Delhi

This article has also appeared in the latest issue of *Samara*.



(From left) Paswan, Hegde, Yadav, Patel and Fernandes at the press conference in New Delhi: resetting equations

Win some lose some

A widower with seven children marries a widow with five children. Soon the two have a few more children of their own. Each time the children are introduced, the hassled parents explain: 'these are mine', the father would point towards the children from his previous wife, and 'these are hers', pointing towards his wife and the children from her first husband. The third group, comprising children out of their current marriage, would be introduced as 'these are our children'

Surendra Mohan, a diehard socialist and member of the Janata Dal after the expulsion of Ramakrishna Hegde from the party, couldn't have described the Janata party better. And probably what the party now needs is a tree diagram explaining which splinter group came from where.

"Yehi to beauty hai socialism ki — na

The Janata Dal splits. One group decides to merge with the Lok Shakti and Samata and join the NDA. But the BJP looks on cautiously

khooon na kharaba Split bhi ho jaate hain aur merger bhi (This is the beauty of socialism — you split and merge without any bloodletting)," party president Sharad Yadav had once laughed about one of the many JD splits.

And clearly, who would know better than him.

Last month, the party (or whatever little is left of it) split yet again. This time the initiative came from unexpected quarters. Karnataka chief minister J.H. Patel — known for his laid-back attitude

— in a surprise move decided to be part of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance. The resistance came from former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, who has already made his intentions of going along with the Congress more than clear.

To avoid any further debate and discussion, the 'forces of social justice' decided to part ways. And as the initial hysteria of a split and a merger settles down, there are many 'problem areas' to contend with.

As far as the BJP is concerned, this is just the tip of the iceberg. For defence minister George Fernandes and Union commerce minister Ramakrishna Hegde, this may have been a major coup but for the BJP this is the beginning of many problems.

Coping with idiosyncratic allies in the previous government was not too easy for the BJP the last time. Now to ally with the Janata Dal in a state preparing for two elections — Assembly and

parliamentary — seems like the BJP will have its plate full. Besides, the state unit of the BJP has been fighting the JD in Karnataka. "Obviously, attacking the JD has been the main plank for the BJP and an alliance with the former takes that away," says Congress spokesperson B.K. Chandrashekhara.

However, the Patel-led Janata Dal is more optimistic. "This will all settle down," says C. Byre Gowda, agriculture minister and state JD president. "We have entrusted Hegdeji to work on these



Chandra Shekhar: having problems with the alliance

minor problems. Besides, the JD and the Lok Shakti are emotionally and ideologically one — we will have no problem in seat adjustment," he adds.

The BJP might gain at the state level since people like Byre Gowda, Nage Gowda and Bacche Gowda are still very strong in their constituencies. It might help the tally move up by a few seats. But there is a lot of discontent building up within the BJP rank and file. "Though veiled protests can be heard, the worker at the grass-roots level is not comfortable being an ally to a worthless party they've been criticising for so long," says a BJP leader.

The situation is not any different for the Congress. While at the central level alliances are being forged and Deve Gowda's frequent trips to 10 Janpath are no secret, there is a lot of anger amongst party workers for even 'considering' an alliance with the Deve Gowda-led JD. The state unit of the Congress is not in favour of an alliance with the Gowda faction.

Moreover, the biggest problem that both parties are likely to face is whom to project as the next chief minister. There are too many contenders — from Hegde to B.S. Yediyurappa within the NDA — with prominent names like Ananth Kumar and Patel in the middle. Similarly, the Congress is faced by the same dilemma.

As with all splits and mergers, a problem of leadership in the state has inevitably led to disputes of leadership at the Centre.

The BJP says it would have welcomed the merger of Janata Dal into the Lok Shakti/NDA, even into the BJP, had things been done democratically, not surreptitiously. But according to the central BJP, George Fernandes never discussed the merger/alliance idea either with L.K. Advani or A.B. Vajpayee. He just went ahead on his own.

Similarly, Hegde didn't bother to take this up with BJP president Kushabhau Thakre. In fact, the commerce minister admitted as much when he went to meet Thakre, that it was their fault that the BJP had been taken by surprise. They were sorry, but there was no time to discuss this.

There are two views about these deve-



Fernandes with Sharad Yadav: burying the

lopments in the BJP. One section of the party believes that the current disaffection between the NDA and the BJP and the suspicions about the NDA's motives in trying to 'strengthen its ally base' is a temporary phenomenon. Things are in a flux and there is natural friction between two sets of leaders having to make space for each other.

But there is another section in the BJP which believes that it has been taken for a ride by the NDA and that this represents the first step in a conspiracy to 'capture' the BJP-led government which will be installed after the elections.

First, the problem of leadership in Karnataka. Will the BJP support Hegde

The fight for the occupation

There were peanuts: heaps and heaps of peanut shells while more were being sold. Boiled or roasted, every person on the street had his mouth full. The *chaiwala* had no time to look around as there were just too many people to serve. And for those who had no time for food, there were *takeaway* orders for the *fastest* food in town: bananas.

And all this was not for the latest David Dhawan release but for a political event to take place shortly.

The two factions of the recently split Janata Dal in Karnataka had a property dispute to settle before it got on with politics. And in a clash that followed, they could give the best Govinda starrer a run for its money.

The Deve Gowda-led JD had already plunked itself inside the JD headquarters at Bangalore. "You know, we had a hunch that the other faction would be up to some mis-

chief," explains C. Narayana Swamy, general secretary of the state unit. According to Narayana Swamy, most Deve Gowda loyalists had entered the office before 9 am on a Sunday morning and when they got wind of the other group's plan, they rushed to the main gate and got it locked. "Only a side entrance was open for people to come in and out," he adds.

C. Byre Gowda, the new state president of the Patel-led Janata Dal in Karnataka, along with three other Cabinet ministers and some 20-odd supporters stomped towards the JD headquarters at Race Course Road. What followed was a hand-to-hand fight between the two sides.

Byre Gowda and his supporters tried to push open the side entrance to the building while Deve Gowda's supporters stood firmly against the gate. "Byre Gowda put his walking stick inside to push us back but I

as CM? Off the record, BJP sources say this will depend on who has the larger number of seats. Which means that until seat-sharing ratios are worked out, on the ground the merger will still be incomplete.

In the last Assembly elections, the BJP contested the bulk of the seats and Hegde was given very few seats to fight. Now Hegde's bargaining power will increase, especially if the JD's symbol is frozen and Dal candidates who have a chance of winning have to contest on a Lok Shakti ticket.

But clearly, all the problems are only in Karnataka. In no other state are there any significant merger pangs coming in the way of the smooth functioning of the Janata Dal and the BJP.

However, there are many in the BJP who feel that they have now been saddled with a liability which will haunt them

till the end of their days. The Janata Dal is full of individualistic politicians who have, several times in the past, attacked the BJP bitterly. Now space will have to be made for all these people.

Take Sharad Yadav. Till January last year, Yadav was saying that his only aim in life was to defeat the BJP at any cost. Even now, he is not saying that he endorses the NDA-BJP's political line. Instead, his defence for jumping ship is: "*Jab dhara hi nahin hai to vichardhara ki kya baat karni* (When there is no party, why talk of ideology)."

Also in the NDA now is I.K. Gujral, who had been a willing and able party to the vilification of the BJP for its handling of the Kargil war. Gujral had also written to the Prime Minister asking him to sack Fernandes for "temperamental unsuitability" not even a month ago.

How can anybody in the NDA-BJP alliance forget those charges?

Things must be as uncomfortable for the ex-Janata Dal members who are now in the NDA. If Chandra Shekhar didn't go along with the NDA and vote for the BJP, it was because "I could not obliterate from my mind the fact that if I voted for the BJP [in the no-confidence motion] I would be voting for the very people who danced and hugged each other with joy when the Babri Masjid was demolished", he told friends soon after the vote which the Vajpayee government lost by a majority of one.

It is difficult to live down the political fact that no matter what they may call it, Messrs Gujral, Yadav, Paswan, etc., are now in the company of those who brought down the Babri Masjid.

The defence that the erstwhile Janata Dal is trotting out is that it will stick to



The resistance to the merger move came from H.D. Deve Gowda, who has already made his intentions of going along with the Congress more than clear

caught hold of it and part of it broke in the scuffle," narrates a youth worker with great pride.

This was heroism at its best and in the chaos Byre Gowda's arm got allegedly twisted. Finally, when those outside failed against the 100-odd people inside the building, they walked away in a huff to stage a *dharna* outside Deve Gowda's residence.

But this is nothing new in the political history of the Janata Dal. Physical assaults and attacks are just mild ways of protesting.

Ramakrishna Hegde and R.V.

Deshpande (now with the Congress) were attacked outside the Vidhana Soudha the day Deve Gowda was elected leader of the JD legislature party. On another occasion, Hegde's house in Sadashivnagar was pelted with stones. And more recently, home minister P.G.R. Scindhia was beaten up with *chappals* at a Dal convention at the National College grounds in Bangalore.

Not surprising in a state obsessed with film personalities. •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore

the agenda of the coalition, not the agenda of the BJP. This depends on how you look at it. How much of its own promises will the BJP succeed in insinuating into the NDA's common agenda? It is hard to say.

What can safely be said however, is that these are routine problems of any merger. What remains to be seen is if the BJP will be able to cope with a party notorious for splits and switching sides. And these are not problems of a pre-electoral package. It is the post-election adjustment that could mean troubled times ahead for the BJP and the NDA. •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore with Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

For cricket's sake

The betting issue should be settled once and for all

The betting scandal in Pakistan entered its second phase with the country's *Ehtesab* (accountability) Bureau ordering the framing of charges against eight players and the ad hoc Pakistan Cricket Board suspending captain Wasim Akram, Ijaz Ahmed and Salim Malik if and until they are exonerated.

In Pakistan, politics and lies have become a part of the national fabric. In the sporting arena, they could shake

bureau — in not returning to Pakistan from England until his lawyer tests the waters with a High Court petition against his suspension from the team.

Other players of the squad have all met the ad hoc PCB chief to plead their respective cases and have been duly informed about a new code of conduct for the players.

And all this despite the fact that the bureau investigation, presented late last

quick succession, pointing to a political move in the making. They have thus accepted at face value the accusations of former players Aamir Sohail, Rashid Latif and Aftab Rahman. Sohail, however, says he is prepared to substantiate his claim that accused players have assets far above their known sources of income.

From the Indian point of view, the court proceedings will be interesting. In a regular court case, it is more than likely that the genesis and development of the betting racket will unfold in great detail.

It's already known that Pakistanis had been betting, principally through an Indian bookie, for almost a decade now. If the last days of Asif Iqbal's captaincy are investigated, a lot of life could be shed on the scandal that probably began with the India-Pakistan Test match in Calcutta.

More important, however, will be details of Indian players' involvement in betting — especially a senior cricketer and a more sprightly one. And Manoj Prabhakar's stand could yet be vindicated in the process.

An amateurish thought process in a professional set-up will naturally lead to complications. Cricket has become an ideal betting sport and certainly the most popular after horse racing. A line has to be drawn between a player and his relatives. In Pakistan, betting is illegal (in India, betting in cricket certainly is) otherwise one could not have faulted a player's brother placing a sizeable amount on his sibling's side losing to minnows like Bangladesh in the World Cup.

It is clear that either Aamir Sohail or Wasim Akram is lying. But one is not so certain that either assertion could be proved beyond reasonable doubt. While it would be in the best interest of the sport that the accused, if not guilty, should be punished and similar proceedings initiated in India on the basis of allegations if and when they are publicly aired, a stalemate will serve neither the players nor the game.

A draw is certainly not the best result. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta



Wasim Akram: facing stiff opposition

cricket to its roots. Imagine eight of the regular national players being ousted from the squad.

Akram has already engaged a lawyer to tackle the problem even as he tries to garner support from the country's main Opposition, the Pakistan People's Party. But he's being just as careful as PPP leader Benazir Bhutto — also charged with financial irregularities by the same

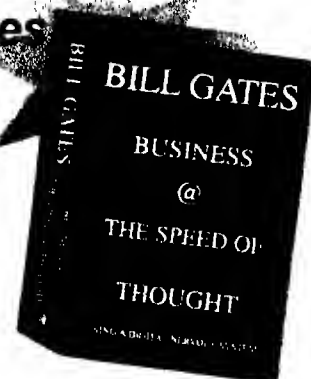
year, had been rejected by the PCB. The Justice Qayyum committee had been set up thereafter. This committee has not presented its report and is not likely to do so until September at least, because the players have been asked to present their cases in mid-August.

The move to dissolve the PCB, set up an ad hoc committee and endorse the accountability bureau report came in



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The female protagonists in Hindi films come into their own

Santokh Ben Jadeja may not have wanted it, but she has become a national figure. The controversial film *Godmother*, inspired by the life of this illiterate rustic-turned-powerful mafia don, hit the jackpot when it won six national awards. The plot traces the evolution of a simple woman who after the death of her husband has to deal with his criminal empire and gradually becomes the undisputed leader of the gang.

"For the first time in Hindi movies, the film portrays a woman character with grey shades who yet emerges as the ultimate hero," says Shabana Azmi, who plays the lead. All those who had a role to play in the making of the film are quite passionate about the issues that have been addressed in it. Co-producer Mala Goenka of Gramco Films fell for the script after reading it just once. "The script was strong and powerful. As a woman I felt that the story had to be told. Director Vinay Shukla was taken in by the unusual theme. "Women have not been given their dues [in films, so far]. There is an inherent drama and dynamism in their struggle and rise to power."

Looks like the winds of change are blowing over mainstream Hindi cinema. Especially, in the last couple of years, increasingly film makers have made serious attempts to delve into the hitherto unnavigated recesses of the woman's consciousness. In *Ha.aaar Chaurasi Ki Maa* Jaya Bachchan turns to self-introspection in trying to relate to



WOMAN

her dead revolutionary son. In the yet-to-be-released *Mother '98*, Rekha plays the glamorous mum, dressed in designer duds and completely unperturbed about being ignorant about the identity of her teenage daughter's father. *Dushman* has the woman protagonist avenging the death of her twin sister by bringing her rapist to book. *Darmiyaan* portrays an ageing actress' struggle. On one hand she must cope with her fading popularity, on the other, there is the suffering associated with bringing up her enunch offspring. In *Mrityudand*, a rabble-rousing Madhuri Dixit shatters the favourite myth propagated by Hindi movies — the heroine who swears by his *pati parameshwar* — by snapping at her chauvinistic husband: "Tum mere pati ho, parameshwar samajhne ki galti mat karna. (You're my husband. Don't make the mistake of supposing that you're my lord and master as well)."

Says Shabana, "In a global dialogue, women are negotiating for more space in all arenas of life, be it politics, development or arts. Women are demanding that their voices be included in finding solution to problems. This metamorphosis is slowly trickling down to our Hindi cinema." Observes film maker Shyam Benegal, "With more women becoming economically independent and hence assertive, there is a rising sentiment in our society about their rights. This is being reflected in our mainstream cinema a little more than it did in the past."

The latter half of the Nineties has seen an increasing dominance of the 40-plus brigade of actresses in films. Often they are playing the protagonists in Hindi films with women-oriented themes. Better still, they are being offered meaty roles — more meaningful ones — more suited to their age. Says Kiron Kher, who played ageing star Zeenat Begum in *Darmiyaan*, "Earlier, at 40, an actress would be relegated to playing her several relationships — that of the shapeless, ever-sacrificing mother, submissive wife or a suffering sister. She would cease to exist as an individual. So, this is indeed a fortunate period in Hindi cine-

MILESTONES

Some memorable women-oriented films of all times

DUNIYA NA MANE: Called *Unexpected* in English, this 1937 film by V. Shantaram really lived up to its name by catching the audience and the film industry unawares with its bold and unusual theme. The small-town firebrand woman protagonist, played by actress Shanta Apte, not only refuses her aged husband his conjugal rights but ultimately forces him to treat her like his other offsprings. The repentant husband, in his dying note, begs for her forgiveness and asks her to remarry instead of spending the rest of her life as a widow.

MOTHER INDIA: This 1957 classic by Mehboob Khan is still considered an epitome of Indian motherhood. It's a saga depicting the struggle of a mother — who loses her husband — to raise her kids singlehandedly and her ability to change her destiny along with that of others around her. Her grit and sense of justice overrides her maternal feelings, when she shoots her son who tries to abduct a young girl.

SAHEB BIBI AUR GHULAM: This Guru Dutt film documents the life of a woman, the lady of an aristocratic conservative household, desperate to find love. Her husband is an alcoholic and a womaniser. She is attracted towards a small-time employee in the household. The passionate creature dies an ignominious death and is buried under the floor of the mansion.

BHUMIKA: This 1977 film by Shyam Benegal has Smita Patil as a talented and ambitious film actress who through her several tumultuous relationships with men tries to discover herself.

ARTH: This 1983 film, directed by Mahesh Bhatt, has Shabana Azmi playing the devoted wife whose husband leaves her for the other woman. The film then revolves around her struggle in establishing her self-worth and living life on her own terms. In a bold departure from conventional themes, the heroine not only refuses to accept her repentant husband, but shuns other emotional anchors in her life.



SAHEB BIBI AUR GHULAM

POWER

When *Godmother*, Shabana Azmi's latest

opus, swept the national film awards announced last week, the buzz that has been surrounding the unusual delay in the announcement rose to a crescendo. Six major awards for a film which has not only not been released, but which has been stopped, seemingly indefinitely, by a court injunction from being released. A film steeped, right from its making, in controversy which doesn't look as if it would wind down in a hurry. The announcement of the national film awards have never been free from friction, but this time the outcry has surprised even the most contentious film critics. There has been all sorts of speculation during the last couple of months. Back in May, when things start seriously gearing up for the awards, we heard that the jury hadn't even been constituted; a little later, it was that the information and broadcasting ministry was dragging its feet; finally, it was that the films had come in, and then no one bothered to ask because the conflict in Kargil was taking up all the attention.

At the press conference to announce the awards, Piyush Mankad, the I&B secretary (he was transferred last week to finance) who sat alongside minister Pramod Mahajan and fielded most of the questions, said that the delay was of no significance because the horrid heat of the Delhi summer had caused the proceedings to slow down a little.

The weather may have cooled off now, but the news about *Godmother's* wins raised the temperature considerably. The film, directed by Vinay Shukla, an old friend of

NO SHOW

Godmother sweeps the national film awards. But when does one get to see it?



GODMOTHER

Shabana's from the Pune Film Institute days, revolves around the life and times of a remarkable woman from the Meer community of Gujarat. These are people who are primarily farmers but who've had to leave their increasingly untillable lands and go into town to seek an uncertain livelihood. The film is based on the real-life character of Santokh Ben, who is reported to have put behind the disadvantages of being a woman and an unlettered one at that, to rise in the murky world of politics with the active help of criminal elements, to become a power centre in her own right.

Godmother was screened at the International Film Festival in Hyderabad in January this year: it opened the Shabana Azmi retrospective, organised to mark the actress's 25 years in films. The public release has since been stalled because Santokh Ben felt that the film 'misrepresented' her life, and that events have been twisted to suit the story. Shabana Azmi, who plays her, had visited her a couple of months ago to see whether she would change her mind. Clearly, Santokh Ben remained unmoved, and the film stayed in the cans.

When information and broadcasting minister Pramod Mahajan was asked how he would deal with the awkward situation thus created (the award-winning films have to be screened publicly soon after the announcement, coinciding with the high-profile award ceremony which is presided by the President), he replied airily, "We'll see."

Long-time media watchers feel that the awards (apart from bagging the one for best actress, the film's won

the best lyricist award for Javed Akhtar, the best music director award for Vishal Bharadwaj, best editing award for Renu Saluja, best male playback singer for Sajeer Abhyankar, and has been adjudged the best film in Hindi) will be used to prise it out of the hole it's presently in. Lobbying is no longer an ugly word when it comes to awards.

There's also the thorny issue of violence. The Censor Board has stringent guidelines on the use of excessive violence, which it seems to apply fairly arbitrarily: it seems to have closed its eyes comprehensively against *Godmother's* excessively violent content. Those of us who saw

FILMS



DIL TO PAGAL HAI

ma where Shabana, Jaya and Kiron can still find challenging central roles."

Even within the restricted parameters of formula films, roles played by women characters are undergoing a gradual metamorphosis. As Shabana says, "In contemporary movies, heroines are more assertive of their rights, choices and more importantly, her sexuality, which was earlier taboo as she had to be projected as an epitome of purity." Women in mainstream Hindi films too are slowly becoming more real, flesh-and-blood characters. The ambitious Juhi Chawla in *Yes Boss*, who wants to make it big in showbiz, doesn't mind telling the middle-class Mick-on-the-make Shah Rukh Khan whom she is attracted to that she cannot marry him since she has always dreamt of big money. "*Do kamzor insaan ek kamyab zindagi nahi bana sakte.* (Two weaklings cannot make a success of life)" The widowed mother played by Farida Jalal in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* goes to a

Pagal Hai. And she tells him so "She may not venture as far as Julia Roberts and emulate her war-is-fair-in-love credo in *My Best Friend's Wedding*, but for a heroine to say that 'I am not happy for you' or 'I'm jealous' in Hindi movies, is revolutionary," says Dinesh Raheja, editor of *Movie* magazine.

However, the moot question seems to be whether women-oriented films sell in our country. Goenka remains confident about the commercial success of *Godmother*. "The criterion for a film to succeed is to tell a story dramatically, which we have done." Otherwise, with the exception of *Fire* which succeeded in setting the box-office on fire, the performance of other recent releases with women-oriented themes can at best be termed in *filmi* parlance as 'fair'. Says Raheja, "Barring a few exceptions, most of these films still remain an urban or elitist phenomena. They receive critical acclaim but fail to register their presence at the box office." *Saat* had to be premiered on STAR Plus as it failed to find distributors. Agrees Tanuja Chandra, maker of Kajol-starrer *Dushman*: "Forget the audience, even the distributors were unwilling to touch this film without a saleable male star. Which is why we had to rope in Sanjay Dutt for the movie."

Shabana, however, has a different experience to share. While watching Bhatt's *Arth*, she recalls, the male audience lustily cheered the woman protagonist in the end when she refused to accept her husband who had earlier left her for another woman. "In fact, the distributors kept insisting that if the movie's end was not changed, it was bound to sink. However, both the directors and I stuck to our guns and *Arth* was a huge commercial hit." Incidentally, she adds, the same fate was not shared by Vinod Pande's *Yeh Nazdikyan* — a movie with a similar theme but a different end — which was also released around the same time.

Bhatt, however, has the last word. "We have not yet done away with our stereotypes of the leading man, who continues to reflect our aspirations rather than our reality. And with regard to women, well, we are yet to scratch the surface of their layered complex characters. As our cinema approaches its centenary, one can only hope for a maturity that will ensure a more varied range of characters in our films — a cinematic celebration of complexities." •

Kanjal Walla/Bombay



MRITYUDAND

In *Mrityudand*, the heroine snaps at her chauvinistic husband. "Don't make the mistake of supposing that you're my lord and master."

the film at the Hyderabad festival were left with a sense of revulsion against the overdose of gratuitous blood-letting, which swamped everything else, including Azmi's fairly credible performance.

After the film's festival screening, the actress had countered the criticism about her character — she smokes cigarettes like a man, she crosses her legs like a man, and she has no compunction about using the gun, also presumably like a man — by saying that Rambhi Ben (her name in the film) is not like a man. She is a character who uses her strengths to empower herself, and other women. She is, said Azmi, the ultimate feminist. •

Shubhra Gupta/New Delhi

summer camp with her granddaughter and has a barrel of fun instead of mourning. "*Aaj tumhare pitaji zinda hote to...* (If only your father had been alive today etc)." Karisma Kapoor is jealous of Madhum Dixit who the hero (on whom Karisma dotes) loves in *Dil To Dardmiyaan*.



THEY'LL ALWAYS SURPRISE US



When a curvaceous ex-veejay, known mainly for her singing talents, tells you, Oh, yeah, singing is fine but now I've got offers to direct music videos, your first reaction is disbelief, right? *Come on.* After a long time-out on the sidelines of fame, **Anaïda** told an incredulous journo of her future plans. "I've worked with Colossus and Sanjay Gupta for *Oova Oova*, Glen and Ankush on *Raghupati...* and *Hakoona Mattata* and all these are great names. These guys have liked my ideas and today I've some offers to direct videos." She isn't the only explorer around. **Sonali Bendre** (right), the other



slim-waisted adventurer, this time from Planet Bollywood, is moving south to charm Tamil viewers away from their buxom heroines. She has signed up for a film called *Kadhalar Manam*. A friendly advice: flesh out, lady.

TOO BAD, BUT IT'S TRUE

Attention actresses: if you've got it, cling to it. Otherwise, rivals — especially ones with vigilant moms — can slip in where you should've been. Anatomy of a disappointment



It started with **Shyam Benegal**, celebrated director, choosing **Karisma Kapoor** instead of **Manisha Koirala** for his film *Zubeida*. How it went wrong for the Nepalese beauty?

Manisha's point of view

- Says Benegal had contacted her last year for the film and she had instantly agreed

- Claims she has also done a few story and costume sittings. But poor markets kept the project on hold. Then fate intervened: tight schedules kept her busy and the whole thing slipped from her mind



- Says that though there was nothing in writing, her personal commitment was total... till the enthusiasm faded

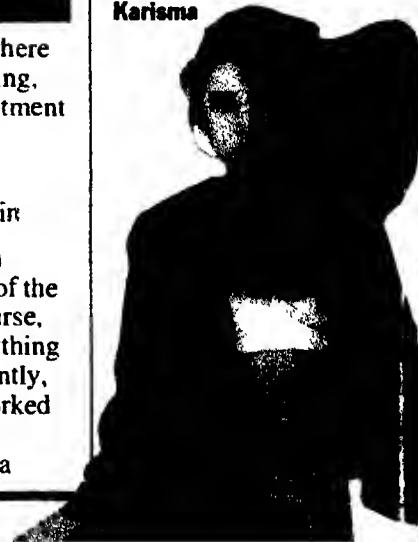
How Karisma came in

- Her mother **Babita** (Kapoor) got wind of the whole thing. Of course, no one's saying anything definite, but apparently, Karisma's mom worked hard at reviving the project. And all for a

noble cause — to get her daughter a serious role

- There's very little Manisha could have done about the whole thing. So she accepted it

Karisma



A Parisian locale, light-skinned beauties in as Indian a dress as sari, some of them bare-midriffed.

It's the late Nineties, man, haute fashion is high fusion. At her Autumn Winter 1999/2000 haute couture show in Paris on 17 July, designer RITU BERI had French style merchants in entranced thrall. One of them,

Francois Lesage, was so utterly charmed that he described the whole affair as fabulous.

Lesage, at whose workshop Beri had trained five years ago, says, "I advised her to stay true to being Indian. Her clothes are to dream about, and we all need to dream." As to how much a potential dreamer would have to pay, Beri is noncommittal. She says she has left that to someone else. It's Lesage, once again, who spells it out. "[In India] it probably costs 45 times less than it does here; people don't get the same salaries."

RITU BERI CASTS A SPELL



Beri with models presenting her creations.



IT'S ALL ABOUT STYLE

In the iconic realms where the rich and famous tread style is probably the ultimate yardstick. At its first annual Black and White Elle Style Awards, 1999, *Elle*, the popular style and fashion magazine, provided us with a list of the country's twelve most stylish. Figuring on it were: Daler Mehndi, Prannoy Roy, Milind Soman, Zakir Hussain, Shabana Azmi, Vijay Mallya, Ajay Jadeja, Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol. The Elle Style Icon, the award for the most stylish person in India, went to supermodel **Madhu Sapre**

THE CONTRAST REVEALS

Most of us forget it, but what we do and how we act shows our mental development

ADITYA 'GET DRUNK' PANSCHOLI

Occupation: Actor

Favourite pastime: Ramming into police patrols at 3.30 am

Details: Returning home in his Land Cruiser, Panscholi crashed into two policemen, abandoned his van a little distance ahead and ran, but was caught



NANA 'PATRIOTIC' PATEKAR

Occupation: Actor

Favourite pastime: Fling with martyrdom, sharing the burden of the *jawans*

Details: The actor went off to Kargil to join the *jawans*. "Doesn't make any sense in just visiting them," he told a friend. "One must go there and share their physical burden"





OUT OF THE BLOCK Mamata Banerjee with Anupam Panja at the rally

Back to the people

Mamata Banerjee kicks off her election campaign

Even the monsoon drizzle could not dampen the spirit. On 21 July, processions were coming in from all parts of Calcutta into Esplanade East where Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee was to address a rally. By the afternoon traffic had come to a standstill. Mamata's supporters had taken charge of the roads. Buses and vans were scurrying towards the venue of the rally, carrying slogan-shouting supporters draped in tricolour Trinamul flags. The meeting was organised to pay homage to the 13 Youth Congress workers who were killed in police firing on the same day in 1993. And Banerjee utilised the occasion to kick off her campaign for the 1999 general elections.

Addressing an impressive gathering, Mamata made two important announcements. The first one concerned Trinamul candidates who were to be fielded in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Announcing the list, Mamata introduced them to the masses. She also declared that this time too, the Trinamul Congress would support an Atal Behari Vajpayee led

government at the Centre, if it is elected after the parliamentary polls.

The crowd went into raptures when she declared that unlike last time, her party MPs will join the Cabinet to serve the people of West Bengal. Last time, in spite of remaining outside the government, we were able to implement part of the Bengal Package. But this time, we will join the Vajpayee led Cabinet to implement the complete package promised to us,' said Banerjee.

Mamata also took pride in the fact that her party was the first one in the country to announce the names of candidates for the forthcoming elections. She said that while selecting the candidates, her party ensured that all sections of the society were well represented in Parliament. 'We saw to it that minorities, OBCs, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes got tickets to contest the polls. Moreover, we are also fielding eminent professionals and hardened politicians known for their anti-Left stand to take on the Left and the Congress in West Bengal,' thundered Mamata amidst cheers.

Indeed, apart from politicians, the Trinamul Congress list this time features a number of new faces. For instance, Tarun Roy, former director of customs, S.M. Murshed, the former state PWD secretary and adviser to J&K Governor, Nitish Sengupta, former member of Planning Commission and Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, a well-known gynaecologist, feature in the list.

Among politicians, it was the Congress veteran Suniti Chattoraj who added a dash of drama. Chattoraj till recent times has been the general secretary of the Congress legislature party in the Assembly. Apart from them, there are Jayanta Bhat-tacharya (former Congress MP), Natwar Bagdi (former CPI-M legislator), Ananda Mohan Biswas (former state minister), Nur-uz-Zaman (leader of a Muslim League faction), Amjad Ali (former Congress Rajya Sabha MP), Gauri Ghosh (chairperson of Midnapore municipality) and others who will contest under the Trinamul banner for the first time.

Apart from the new faces, sitting MPs like Mamata Banerjee, Bikram Sarkar, Ajit Panja, Krishna Bose, Ranjit Kumar Panja and Akbar Ali Khondakar are in the fray. However, Bikram Sarkar is the only one who has been shifted from Howrah to Mathurapur in South 24-Parganas. "Quality and background were taken into consideration before the list was finalised by the working committee. In fact, Mamata discussed the list with Prime Minister Vajpayee last month and only then did she decide to make it public," disclosed Gautam Basu, Trinamul vice-president and observer for Birbhum district.

AJIT PANJA'S PARTY LINE

Party Fund: "For a fledgling party like ours, it's really tough to contest two polls within a year. However, since many of us in the party are professionals, we are contributing from our own pockets to raise funds for the polls."

Election Manifesto: "Apart from the full implementation of the Bengal Package, we want primary education and health system to be revived in the state. We will also stress on tuning up the district administration. We would demand increasing the number of district magistrates so that one could concentrate on law and order, the second could look into polls and voters' list and the third could concentrate on developmental activities."

"We will tell the people to vote for us and send us to the government and we in return would guarantee more employment, improved education and health services and better law-and-order situation."

Minority Position: "In the last 13 months of Vajpayee government, there hasn't been a single communal riot. That is a no mean achievement. Today, the minorities have realised that a BJP-led government is no longer a threat to the community. In our state, we expect a complete swing of the minority votes from the Congress to the Trinamul."

Joining The Cabinet: "That is for certain, if we win the elections. And this time, we would certainly want portfolios that would benefit the people of the state. My 14-years experience as a minister has convinced me that you can do wonders for the people even while heading a low-profile ministry."

It was the Birbhum coup engineered by Trinamul on the eve of the rally that hit the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee (WBPPCC) hard. In a sudden move, Suniti Chattoraj, a PCC legislator and general secretary of the CLP, crossed over to the Trinamul camp. Both PCC president A.B.A. Ghami Khan Chowdhury and working president Priya Ranjan Das Munshi expressed anguish over the manner in which Chattoraj switched allegiances without informing the party leadership.

Meanwhile, the Trinamul Congress is organising a party meeting on 2 August to chalk out the strategy of the election campaign. "Many of our candidates are new to politics, so this will be a workshop to train our candidates on how to face the people during the campaign," said state party chairman and MP Ajit Panja.

This time, the Left Front is determined to stop Maniata



THREE IS COMPANY: (from left) TMC state president Sanjay Bakshi, Mamata Banerjee, and senior BJP leader Vishnu Kant Shastri

Banerjee. Recently, CPI(M) state secretary and Politburo member Anil Biswas said that the Marxists would ensure her defeat in the coming polls. "This shows the desperation in the Left camp. This is nothing but wishful thinking," claims Panja.

In response to Biswas's statement, Mamata has challenged West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu to contest against her from the South Calcutta constituency — which has returned Mamata to Parliament on three consecutive occasions.

Behind the scenes, posters and festoon factories are busy churning out Trinamul's election material. The candidates are learning their scripts and the party workers are waiting to hit the trail with Mamata's breezy election campaign to be flagged off on 15 August, the day the Trinamul Congress will release its election manifesto. •

Arindam Sarkar/Calcutta

ANDHRA PRADESH

Stop that!

The EC clamps down on Naidu's populist schemes after announcing simultaneous polls in the state

The Congress is hitting at him from all directions. But this was probably the unkindest cut of all. On 10 July, the Election Commission (EC) announced simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Andhra Pradesh Assembly in September. Five days later, it asked chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu to put a halt to three of his most important welfare programmes — Janmabhoomi, Adarna and Deepam.

Adarna involved distribution of modern tool-kits to local artisans in an effort to upgrade their skills; Deepam involved distribution of 10 lakh gas connections to rural women to try and reduce the use of firewood; and Janmabhoomi involved all of rural AP and encompassed almost all of Naidu's electoral ambitions. Ironically, the complaint about these 'populist measures' was made by ex-MP and former Telugu Desam Party (TDP) big boy in Delhi P. Upendra, who has now crossed

over to the Congress.

Understandably, Naidu is incensed. He has asked the EC to reconsider its decision. At the time of going to press, a meeting had been scheduled at Nirvaahan Sadan to settle the matter. From all indications, this is a battle Naidu *might* just win. Certainly, it is a battle Naidu cannot afford to lose.

If 'electronic governance' is Chandrababu Naidu's pet obsession, Janmabhoomi is his electoral backbone. Essentially rural, it is a reasonably novel self-help programme where the government builds and pays for public works like roads, schools and water-retention systems — if the local beneficiaries pool in 10-15 per cent of the cost and are responsible for its maintenance. The idea is to make the public feel responsible for its own welfare instead of being completely dependent on government dole.

Naidu is fuming because, by all accounts, after ten rounds and a few hundred crores, the programme had finally worked. And he hopes that while his IT-enthusiast image will appeal to the urban voter, Janmabhoomi will rope in the rural ones. To be fair to Naidu, he has a case. For one, Janmabhoomi is an ongoing programme, not a recent announcement. And so is Adarna. As Naidu says, "Janmabhoomi was launched in 1997 and allocations for its components were made in three successive budgets. Adarna too was started in 1997-98." (The chief minister has taken some liberties there because Adarna came into operation in 1998-99).

Naidu also argues that if these are to be stopped on the eve

Thin red line

The ruling Left Front battles itself and the Opposition to win three crucial municipalities in West Bengal

Perhaps this is the first time during the 22-year rule of the Left Front in West Bengal that almost all members of the CPI(M) state secretariat, including some Politburo members, had to be involved in civic body elections.

In the recent elections to the Dum Dum and South Dum Dum municipalities, the party's 'election machinery' included Politburo member Biman Bose, minister of information and police Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, secretariat member Binoy Konar, housing minister Gautam Deb, minister of municipal affairs Ashoke Bhattacharya, environment and tourism minister Manab Mukherjee and state secretary Anil Biswas. Chief minister Jyoti Basu, too, showed interest in these municipal polls.

Both the municipalities belong to the Dum Dum parliamentary constituency which became famous as a CPI(M) stronghold till they lost it to the BJP in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. The BJP candidate won with a margin of 1,37,000 votes. The CPI(M) cannot afford to lose it again in the Lok Sabha polls scheduled to be held on 1 October this year. That's why, the Trinamul Congress, the Congress and the BJP supporters allege that it wanted to ensure its victory by hook or crook in most of the wards of the South Dum Dum and Dum Dum municipalities.

The CPI(M)-led South Dum Dum municipality increas-

ed the number of wards from 25 to 35, adding CPI(M)-dominated panchayat areas to the weaker municipal wards. The South Dum Dum municipal authority reallocated areas of the wards considering the CPI(M) vote-banks, ignoring the suggestions and opinions of the councillors of the Opposition. All this the CPI(M) did very methodically after losing the Dum Dum seat in the last Lok Sabha polls, the BJP alleged.

Moreover, there was a war of attrition between rival camps in the party — one led by transport minister Subhas Chakraborty and the other by the North 24 Parganas dis-





MASS APPEAL?: Chandrababu Naidu reaching out to rural voters

of elections, so should other long-standing centrally-sponsored programmes. "I only want to say that several central schemes such as the IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) and the PMRY (Prime Minister's Rozgar

Yojana) also entail financial assistance in cash or kind. I'd like to ask the commission if they are also being stopped. Moreover, states like Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh provide subsidised power to the farmers. What about those subsidy schemes?"

But the Deepam scheme was launched on 9 July, a day before the polls were announced. It made sense to inform the EC about it and seek its permission. Instead, the TDP government chose to ignore the commission altogether and CEC M.S. Gill doesn't take kindly to being ignored.

Chandrababu Naidu also asked for trouble with the promotion and transfer of 15 senior police officials the day polls were announced. Home minister Madhav Reddy argues that the Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC) cleared the promotions on 28 June, the chief minister okayed them on 29 June, and it was a mere coincidence that the transfer orders were given on 10 July. But the Pradesh Congress president, Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, claims the orders were pre-dated "to post amenable police officers where the TDP is weak".

In a way, the EC's announcement has caught Chandrababu Naidu on the back foot. Assembly elections were not due in Andhra Pradesh till December and the TDP leader had been banking on being in power till October — the 'deadline' to put his pet systems in place.

Sarita Rani/Hyderabad

district committee secretary Amitava Basu — which might have been one of the reasons for the setback in the last parliamentary polls. The district committee charged Chakraborty and his followers with working against the party's interest and the state secretariat expelled some activists close to him before the civic polls. A show-cause notice was served on the leader himself.

The expelled cadres contested the civic polls forming a new organisation with 'two leaves' as their election symbol. Even the Forward Bloc, a Left Front partner, contested independently.

Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee supported the expelled CPI(M) candidates like Sujit Bose, an associate of Chakraborty and a councillor of the South Dum Dum municipality.

Though the CPI(M) managed a majority in all the municipalities — South Dum Dum, Dum Dum and Maheshtala (South 24 Parganas district) — where polls were held on 18 July, 'two leaves' got a good chunk of seats in South Dum Dum. But the CPI(M) won in Maheshtala and wrested the Dum Dum municipality from the Marxist Communist Party of India (MCPI) led by Sudhir Bhattacharya. The latter had broken away from the CPI(M) in the mid-Eighties.

In the end, the expelled faction of the CPI(M) proved to be its main rival. Even during campaigning, warnings were issued to some party cadres that they would face dire consequences for anti-party activities.

According to sources, Mamata Banerjee took the initiative to get Sujit Bose elected and even to project him as prospective chairman of the South Dum Dum municipality. Chakraborty's associates apprehend that he may be suspended in the near future for his 'tacit support'. Party hardliners — who have a majority both in the state secretariat and the Politburo — such as Biman Bose, Niren Ghosh, and Binay Konar do not favour his pragmatic approach which, on the other hand, is reportedly supported by the chief minister himself.

But more than party squabbles, local people feel that the polls exposed the 'corruption' within the CPI(M)-ruled civic bodies more clearly. Some party members also fear that if it cannot get rid of the charges of corruption and nepotism, even after expelling the dissidents, the CPI(M) could be headed for trouble.

Ashta Dutt/Calcutta



LEFT IS RIGHT: jubilant CPI(M) supporters in South Dum Dum; Subhas Chakraborty

Dying young

John F. Kennedy Jr's tragic death was not turned into a spectacle

The question on a BBC bulletin, updating us on the day John F. Kennedy's body was recovered from the ocean, was significant. He was the closest thing that Americans had to royalty, so what's the mood of the nation? Is it somewhat like what happened in England after Princess Diana died?

The reporter who'd been staked out at Hyannisport through the day was quick to disagree. The charismatic Kennedy's may have been 'like royalty', but they were indisputably people with a solid democratic core. The Americans were in a sombre, uncharacteristically introspective mood: JFK Jr represented the last link with a happier, safer era. But there was no outpouring of national hysteria, the way it was after Di's death: it was a quieter mourning.

The deathly spiral of John F. Kennedy Jr's plane into the deep waters of the ocean, just a little way off his sprawling family estate in Martha's Vineyard, which killed him and



TEARS IN HEAVEN: JFK Jr and wife Carolyn Bessette

his passengers — his wife and her sister — has been keeping the networks busy around the clock.

We've been getting vignettes of his life (his photographs as a toddler with his father, the original JFK, which acquired immediate poignancy; his teenage years and early adulthood in which he managed not to live up to the legacy of being wild and feckless like his uncle and cousins; and his Manhattan lifestyle, which involved commuting on his trademark bicycle, and being the publisher of a satirical political magazine, remaining steadfast on his stand not to join politics) interspersed with images of the ship hauling the plane's wreckage out of the sea, and the understated funeral where members of both families scattered the ashes with TV cameras maintaining a decent distance.

He may have lived his life under the constant, demanding gaze of the media, but his death wasn't turned into a circus: an apt epitaph for a man who would not be king. •

BIHAR

Trouble trip

Yashwant Sinha's visit to Ranchi sparks off a controversy

There is still some way to go before elections, but a visit by Union finance minister Yashwant Sinha has already caused a controversy in the Jharkhand region. Sinha had been invited to the Abdul Razzaque Ansari Hospital, of the Apollo group, at Irha in Ranchi district, by Manzur Ahmad Ansari. M.A. Ansari is the chairman of the hospital that is named after his late father (a veteran Congress leader and founder of the Weavers Association of Bihar). And he is also the general secretary of the regional Congress committee.

The occasion highlighted the plight of the Congress in this tribal region of south Bihar. Senior Congressmen here took the opportunity to register their protest against the way the party high command had ignored the Jharkhand belt while taking vital decisions pertaining to Bihar, and to cosy up to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader.

During his hour-long stopover at the hospital on his way back to Delhi from Hazaribagh, Sinha lent a patient car to the employees. He also met Congressmen led by Ansari and party veteran Satyadeo Narain Tewary, who is the principal adviser to the president of the regional Congress committee, Sushila Kerketta.

This fuelled trouble in the BJP ranks with local MP Ramtahal Choudhary, who heads an anti-Sinha lobby in south Bihar, choosing to stay away. Choudhary then raised the matter with a section of the party high command. The national general secretary of the BJP, K.N. Govindacharya, was apprised of the development during a pre-poll meeting at Ranchi. Choudhary is said to have condemned the finance minister's visit to the hospital and demanded "disciplinary action" against him. Other local BJP leaders belonging to the Choudhary camp also expressed their displeasure over Sinha's hobnobbing with Congressmen.

Meanwhile, the regional leadership of the Congress has chosen to downplay the event in an attempt to prevent further trouble. According to sources, the regional Congress committee fears that any action against Ansari or Tewary could lead to a split in the local unit. So, Ansari has been allowed to wield considerable influence over deciding on candidates for the forthcoming polls.

M.A. Ansari told SUNDAY that while he had refused to contest the elections, he would ensure that the party high command would not field "undeserving candidates" in the Jharkhand region. After the sudden demise of Gyan Ranjan, former Rajya Sabha member, Ansari has been desperate to fill the void in Congress's Jharkhand politics. And now, he's desperate to play a role in the ongoing power play between former Union home minister Subodh Kant Sahay and senior Congressman Roshan Lal Bhatiya. Ansari has decided to back Bhatiya's play despite the fact that he is out on bail in connection with the murder of a Christian priest, Father Martin Tete.

Plagued by infighting and bereft of leadership, the Congress's challenge in the tribal belt of South Bihar seems to have ended long before the first ballot has been cast. •

D.P. Sharan/Ranchi



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 1 AUGUST, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

It will now be easier to take dramatic strides forward without attracting undue attention to your plans. Stealth and secrecy is essential to the success of your schemes. Don't spill the beans even to people you are close to. Your best work will be done unobtrusively behind the scenes.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

This should be a less demanding week both at work and at home. Routine chores will take up less of your time and energy, allowing you to pursue activities of special interest. Secrets hopes and dreams that you are slowly but steadily moving forward to can come that much closer to realization.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Social gatherings may have to attended out of sheer duty, but they are likely to be rather tense. You will be in the mood to spread your wings and fly, but can be prevented from being free. Family members can contract serious ailments, so that special treatment or nursing is required.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

It can be to your advantage to keep influential people guessing. It is certainly a bad idea to press them for immediate answers. Patience will pay dividends. Try to make instant decisions to gain from new financial opportunities before others beat you to it.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

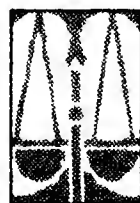
Marital problems will not go away simply by sweeping them under the carpet. Some serious talking may be required to find solutions to difficulties that are spoiling the relationship. Visiting places of entertainment can be enjoyable. Introspection will allow you to see what you are heading for.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

There are some miscreants at work, trying to sabotage your plans and ideas. Your natural reaction may be to rule them out and carry on regardless. But this would simply store up trouble for yourself later. Try to find a compromise that would accommodate both your needs and those of loved ones.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

This is a good period for getting the home into better shape. Redecorating will give the place a welcome new look. You will now probably be clear-sighted enough to commit to long-term contracts. Medical checkups will put your mind at rest. Your financial resources will be in a healthier state.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

Work and act by instinct rather than attempting to think things out step-by-step. You will probably only be chasing your own tail if you try to rationalize your current position. Emotional problems can seem totally unsolvable but spontaneous actions or statements can produce just the right effect.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

It is vital to look before you leap. Impulsive moves or decisions can land you knee-deep in trouble. Do not take an overly independent stance in partnership affairs. Discuss with loved ones before taking the plunge. You may have to make repeated visits to superiors to drive the nail home.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

Writers may receive welcome news from publishers. Manuscripts are likely to be accepted for publication. It seems that influential people some distance away are working with your best interests at heart. Good news can come by letter or phone.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

It's not a time for side stepping issues. You must be more prepared to fight for your rights, even though this may stir up the kind of disturbance you most want to avoid. People will walk all over you if you encourage them to do so.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

People will be quick to see just where your heart lies, and what your true intentions are. Quieter conditions should allow you to ease up and let events follow their own course for the time being. You may develop a renewed interest in books and study.

Price of friendship

Power minister Rangarajan Kumaramangalam has barely recovered from his problems over the purchase of equipment for BHEL, when another controversy threatens to loom up.

This concerns the Khemkas, the owners of the now



Kumaramangalam: controversial clearance

defunct airline, NEPC, which closed down due to financial unviability. The Madras-based Khemkas and Kumaramangalam are very good friends and helped each other out on numerous occasions.

Now the Khemkas, deep in the red, have sought their friend's help in a related matter. Apparently, some piece of machinery, which costs up to Rs 100 crore, was lying idle with them. It could be used for power generation. Could Kumaramangalam help in its purchase — by the National Hydel Power Corporation (NHPC) for instance?

Apparently, Kumaramangalam has okayed this purchase. Whether NHPC has any use for this equipment is not known. But it's going ahead and buying it and paying the Khemkas Rs 100 crore.

Now that's what you call friendship!

HEARD AT SHASTRI BHAVAN

It is a decision taken for the PM, by the PM and of the PM.

A BUREAUCRAT ABOUT HOW THE PRIME MINISTER, INFORMATION MINISTER PRAMOD MAHAJAN AND ISPAT CHIEF PRAMOD MITTAL WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN GETTING THE DIRECT-TO-HOME (DTH) SYSTEM INTRODUCED

Millennium bug

Beware of 2000. The United States has assessed India's Y2K readiness and reached the conclusion that 30 to 40 per cent of the Indian industry is not Y2K compliant and what is more, is appearing to do nothing about it.

In a warning, apparently unclassified, posted on the Internet, the state depart-

ment says that though India has a huge infotech base, many crucial industries are unaware about the glitches Y2K non-readiness could cause in the system.

It cites the state electricity boards, shipping firms, etc., as the biggest offenders.

With 30 to 40 per cent of the industrial sector yet to address the problem, the first week of the new millennium could turn out to be pretty chaotic for India.

Different taste

The Kothari brothers have split. The two brothers, Vikram and Deepak, who owned Pan Parag

The pan masala which owns a big market share in that commodity, is now going to be split two ways, Pan and Parag. The patriarch of the family, their father, has decided to side with the younger brother, Deepak.

CHECK-LIST

Global trade liberalisation and the United States

■ Thank God: The messy dispute over the director-generalship of the WTO has been resolved. The Kiwi trade unionist turned politician, Mike Moore, and the erudite aristocratic Thai candidate, Supachai Panitchpakdi, will share the tenure with Supachai getting the plum latter half. The crisis was largely of the US's making which favoured Moore but wouldn't say so openly.

■ But: For a nation committed to transparent world trade, the US failed miserably in its leadership of the WTO. China offered to become a member but its terms were rejected because the US thought it could wear China down. It kept blaming Japan for slowing down trade talks because Japan allegedly had forest and industrial pressures on it.

And the US kept saying it wanted talks to move much faster than the seven-year long Uruguay round but deadlines didn't matter when it came to issues concerning its interests.

■ And now? APEC countries have fixed 2020 as the year by which there will be a total liberalisation of the Pacific region. Even the South Asian community believes it will be able to offer free trade by 2020.

But in the US Congress, Bill Clinton's trade department can't get its act together.

■ So all this: Makes you wonder about the US's commitment to free global trade at all.



Vikram Kothari: splitting up

However, it is Vikram who has the formula of the pan masala. So the rumour mill is buzzing wildly about how the quality of the pan masala will be affected. Deepak has kept with him the mineral water 'Yes' and is going to intensify its marketing.

But the money-spinner is the pan masala. So users of Pan Parag should watch out. It is going to taste different now. •

Subtle reference

One thing you have to say for Pramod Mahajan. He's never at a loss for words.

At the National Films Awards ceremony, Mahajan delivered the key note address but was found — uncharacteristically for him — stumbling over some words in his speech. He was asked why. "Mein Roman lipi mein Hindi padhne ka audi nahin hoon (I'm not used to reading Hindi in the Roman script)," was his reply. Obviously the reference was lost on no one.

All the president's men

Here is another piece of information about Soma Gandhi's proximity to various Congressmen. On her desk is a daily schedule



Sonia Gandhi: Noting the leaders

of all those who meet her. So it says: '10 am — Balram Jhakar', '11 am — Rajesh Pilot', etc. When Arjun Singh's name is mentioned, the schedule says: '3 pm, Arjun Singhji'.

HEARD IN BOMBAY

Q: Why is Sharad called Sharad?

A: Because he is what he does.

A SHIV SENA WORKER ON SHARAD PAWAR'S CAPACITY FOR POLITICAL CHARADE

Strange politics

A section of the PCC leadership in West Bengal desperately want Siddhartha Shankar Ray to win the elections this time. Ray is contesting from Calcutta North-West constituency. For the state Congressmen, Ray's victory would give a great boost to the dilapidated party.

The real story, however, lies elsewhere. Apparently, some PCC leaders are upset about the manner in which they are being treated by Pranab Mukherjee. And they



S.S. Ray: PCC's trump card

CHECK-LIST

The Janata Dal: the states where it doesn't exist anymore

■ **Tamil Nadu:** There was never a Janata Dal of any consequence in the state. But there were leaders. Now they have all joined the BJP.

■ **Orissa:** The Janata Dal had a strong presence in the state one time. It is now wiped out.

■ **Kashmir:** Led by Mufti Mohammed Sayeed the Janata Dal represented all those who were moderates but were disenchanted by Farooq Abdullah. That movement is finished after the major chunk of the Janata Dal went to the BJP.

■ **Uttar Pradesh:** Originally, one of the states where the Janata Dal was born. Subsequently, it suffered so many splits and degradations (specifically from Mulayam Singh Yadav) that it is now a non-party in power politics.

■ **Gujarat:** Once the Janata Dal was so strong in the state that a representative from Gujarat was its president, Indubhai Patel. But after the death of Chimanbhai Patel it lost a lot of ground. The current split has broken its back.

feel that the only way Mukherjee's domination over the WBPCCC could be checked is by ensuring Ray's victory in the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

No wonder, every night, you see hordes of senior PCC leaders visiting Ray's residence to convey their support and good wishes to him. Indeed, politics make strange bed-fellows. Only a

year back, many of these leaders had openly criticised Ray and even said that a ticket to Ray would only damage the party's image.

Close encounter

It's not often that P.R. Kumaramangalam lets anyone else have the last word, but just this once, Kamal Nath beat him to it.

The two were sitting in a television studio, waiting for a TV recording and predictably the conversation turned to the Lok Sabha polls. Each insisted that his party would form the next government. And scoffed at the other for day-dreaming.

Wait and see, said Ranga snuggly. And then added, "You don't change your leader after the elections."

"And you don't change your party after the elections," retorted Nath. *

Independent move

Who has what plans for 15 August?

According to informed sources, this year, in a departure from past practice, the Prime Minister's Red Fort speech is going to be an

HEARD IN THE AICC

The only intelligence failure the country will have to suffer is in our party — Arjun Singh.

AN ANTI-ARJUN SINGH WORKER



extempore one. Atal Behari Vajpayee will speak in Hindi and will not rely on a prepared text but will speak off the cuff, what he's best at.

Other leaders have other plans. According to some sources, Congress president Sonia Gandhi is weighing the options of announcing to the country, her intention of not being a prime ministerial candidate of her party. She may name her nominee — Dr Manmohan Singh — sometime end of August.

There are some who say this is a move made too late.

Game, BJP style

It's probably the first time that a (former) police commissioner needed a recommendation from a police inspector. But if the

Vajpayee: will give an extempore speech from Red Fort

CHECK-LIST

Former Prime Ministers: what they are doing

■ **Chandra Shekhar:** Is taking a keen interest in the activities of Sharad Pawar and Mulayam Singh Yadav. It is possible that he may relaunch himself once the Pawar-Mulayam outfit takes off.

■ **P.V. Narasimha Rao:** Is in London, lamenting the passing of a more gracious age in politics — so it is safe to assume that he is out of it all.

■ **V.P. Singh:** Also in London, but battling serious health problems.

■ **Inder Kumar Gujral:** Has now allied with the BJP. George Fernandes, Ramakrishna Hegde, et al — for him the cold war with the BJP is over.

■ **H.D. Deve Gowda:** In the vanguard of the anti-BJP movement with the Congress and the Left, a move that the Karnataka Congress(I) is watching with some trepidation.

rumour mill is to be believed, this is precisely how T.R. Kakkar got his current job in the home ministry.

And the police inspector who lobbied for him happens to be married to Balbir Punj, a senior BJP journalist. Which is all very well. But because of the lobbying a decent man — and as it so happens, another former police commissioner, Nikhil Kumar — lost his job.

But then that's the way the BJP plays the game.

For a few dollars more

Why Piyush Mankad?

No one is doubting the newly appointed finance secretary's qualifications for the job, but until the last moment, it seemed as if it would be a close call between Y.V. Reddy and Mankad. Both are highly qualified, and unlike the third candidate, the savvy N.K. Singh, neither had incurred the wrath of the finance minister.

But one of the things that apparently swung the deal in Mankad's favour was that most bureaucrats remember a *faux pas* that the deputy director of the Reserve Bank of India made three years ago. At the time, the rupee was valued at Rs 35 against the dollar, but despite this Reddy announced publicly that the rupee was overvalued. Immediately, the market reacted, and the rupee crashed.

After all, ask finance ministry officials, shouldn't a deputy governor of the Reserve Bank watch out for the country's economy as a whole? Or should he give priority to the imports? Reddy, who is supposed to have made this statement in Goa at the Banker's Club, later said that he had been misquoted. But damage was done.

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WEST BENGAL: THE YANKS SHOW THE WAY

SUNDAY



To the polls!

To the polls!

Leaders and people
get ready for the exams



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Leaders and parties get ready for the exams

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The inheritors

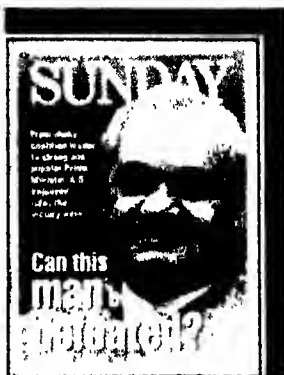
Uddhav versus Raj: the fight for the Thackeray throne



FOCUS 52

The Pied Piper of Calcutta

Can WBIDC chairman Somnath Chatterjee bring foreign investors to West Bengal?



Coming of age

This refers to the cover story *Can this man be defeated?* (25—31 July). Doubtless, the BJP would now cash in on the post-Kargil charisma of Atal Behari Vajpayee in the poll campaign. With Vajpayee as the trump card, the BJP hopes to reap the dividends of moving from the fringe to the mainstream of politics. Vajpayee's popularity today makes him bigger than the party itself.

Vajpayee has taken the BJP well beyond the incremental votes that Advani hoped his leadership would attract. He has conclusively destroyed the BJP's pariah status less than three years after his first government fell in just 13 days. Beginning from the nuclear tests and culminating in the defence of Kargil, Vajpayee has systematically pursued the goal of a strong state. That is what distinguishes the BJP from the centre-Left opposition.

Samir Chakraborty, Howrah (West Bengal)

■ There is no gainsaying the fact that the BJP is almost impregnable in the wake of the Kargil conflict. The party is riding on the crest of the victory wave. And the man who will be the main focus of the party's campaign in the coming elections is none other than Vajpayee himself. After the Kargil war, Vaj-

payee is a completely transformed man. He has not only found his feet, but there is a distinct spring in his step. Vajpayee's growing clout is visible in the manner in which the RSS and the VHP have been forced to down-play Hindutva.

Sapna Agarwal, New Delhi

He also served

The writer has offered valid arguments in defence of the Indian skipper (*Azha!* 27 June—3 July). I agree with him that Azhar should not be made scapegoat for India's World Cup misadventure. The writer has mentioned his excellent record as captain.

The talk of 'resting' Azharuddin makes sense but a campaign to sack him is not justified. I fail to understand why there is so much hue and cry to sack Azhar. The BCCI must give him some rest but should not humiliate him by giving him the boot. After all, India got the glorious victory against Pakistan in this

World Cup under his leadership.

Onkar Chopra, Ludhiana (Punjab)

Give it a thought

The credit for the Kargil victory goes solely to the brave *jawans* and their single-minded devotion, commitment and dedication (*Victory!* 18—24 July). No political party should take credit because it is the brave soldiers who decide our fate in times of war. Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is either a hypocrite trying to put the blame on the religious fundamentalists or a coward unable to confess his abortive adventurism.

Obduracy of the Pakistani Army and belligerence of the religious bigots have caused so much of devastation to lives and property. If only our foolish neighbour had thought about its poor economic conditions, it wouldn't have contemplated

Atal Behari Vajpayee: a transformed man



Indian troops on Tololing ridge: Jal Jawan

a misadventure like this. Most importantly, it did not learn anything from the previous lessons.

It's time we thought about the welfare of our *jawans*. It would be unpardonable if we fail to take up the welfare measures for the war widows and the hapless children of the soldiers who sacrificed for the nation. After the general elections, when the new government will come to power, the first and foremost duty of the government should be to allot special fund for the welfare of the family of the great warriors.

U.S. Iyer, Bangalore (Karnataka)

Simply ridiculous

It is surprising why Kapil Dev was subject to ridicule when he said that India should refrain from playing cricket with Pakistan when the two countries are at war (*Patriot games* 18—24 July). He was voicing his opinion in the best interest of the nation.

But for the fact that the Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray whose secular credentials have always been dubious chose to endorse his statement, it is doubtful whether Kapil Dev's sta-



ment would have raked up such a controversy. The fact is that we cannot simply wish away the existence of our war-happy neighbour and we have to strive to find everlasting peace and learn to live in harmony with Pakistan. And this can be best achieved by the interaction between the people of the two countries

The fact that Indian movie stars are revered in Pakistan is heart-warming and if these movie stars are made cultural ambassadors of our country, it can help improve bilateral ties better than the futile diplomatic talks between the two countries.

Lastly, it is unfair to harass Dilip Kumar and Shabana Azmi for the mere fact that they are Muslims. Dilip Kumar can hardly be called anti-national just because he accepted the 'Nishan-e-Pakistan' award. Let's not forget the fact that their great contributions were towards our country and not Pakistan. And, so it seems ridiculous that anybody can be so ungrateful as to doubt their loyalty towards the country.

Nalini Sudhakaran,
Trivandrum (Kerala)

Utter callousness

This refers to the story *No minor matter* (18—24

July). The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) wants 100 Lok Sabha seats reserved for minorities. One wonders, when the democratic structure of the state is based on universal adult franchise, why should the writer bring up the issues of Muslim religious reforms and education. Have we already devalued the worth of Muslim vote citing their low level of education and economic status?

Muslims are systematically kept off armed forces, security and police agencies, state and central government jobs and are denied access to equal rights for education, employment and political empowerment. And, whenever they try to assert their constitutional rights, they are summarily dubbed as 'Pakistani'. Is this a healthy attitude to treat 120 million Muslims of India? Indian Muslims have burned their boats and will never again accept the Partition of either their own community or the country that is as much theirs as that of their compatriots. Why should Muslims accept this alienation and discrimination? Partition and creation of Bangladesh was the successful application of the old imperial British policy of

'divide and rule'.

The writer's comment on Dr Tahir Mahmood's demand for reservation of seats in Lok Sabha for Muslims is fully representative of the callous and flawed attitude of elite minority ruling in the name of majority Hindus towards 120 million minority Muslims who have yet to learn the rules of the game.

Ghulam Muhammed, Bombay
(Maharashtra)

Giving a big boost

It is a matter of great pride that Bhaichung Bhutia has got an opportunity for trial in England (*More hurdles*, 25 July—31 July). Bhaichung is the first Indian soccer player who has earned the distinction of playing for trial on the English soil. But I was dismayed to read that the Sikkim lad needs a work permit before playing for Fulham FC.

Lot depends on how his agent P.C. Raj Purohit handles the whole thing. Although Calcutta fans will be deprived of his great soccer moments, Bhaichung's success will give a big boost to Indian football and encour-



Bhaichung Bhutia: has done Indian football proud

age young footballers to follow his footsteps.

Sagar Chatterjee, Siliguri
(West Bengal)

Identity crisis

Mani-Talk published in the 18—24 July issue of SUNDAY is a classic example of the prejudiced mindset of the columnist. He is known widely to be the most boisterous buffoon of the Congress party. And very rightly no one takes him seriously, not even those in his own party. But the way he has thrown all senses of proportion and decency to the wind in his outburst against the incumbent Prime Minister of India, is simply disdainful, to say the least and it ought to be condemned by one and all.

It appears, he is in a deep identity crisis within the Congress itself and in trying to get the 10 Janpath rescue boat, he has lost whatever little sanity he might have had. He doesn't even know that he is too small and insignificant to apprehend the great personalities like Sir Winston Churchill, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He takes their names as if they were his playmates.

M.D. Asthana, Lucknow (UP)

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Rajat Sharma
TV anchor



Abhey Oswal
Business executive

Contributed by Sadhana Dasgupta, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

RECEIVED: The Indian cricket team, on 28 July. He replaces Mohammad Azharuddin.

AWARDED: to Martin Kampchen, visiting fellow at Santiniketan, the Order of Merit of the German Federal Government, for his "singular dedication to the friendship between India and Germany".

CHOOSEN: Dr Verghese Kurien, architect of India's white revolution, for the prestigious Paulo Mar Gregorio Award for 1999, in recognition of his pioneering work in community-based development and cooperative movement.



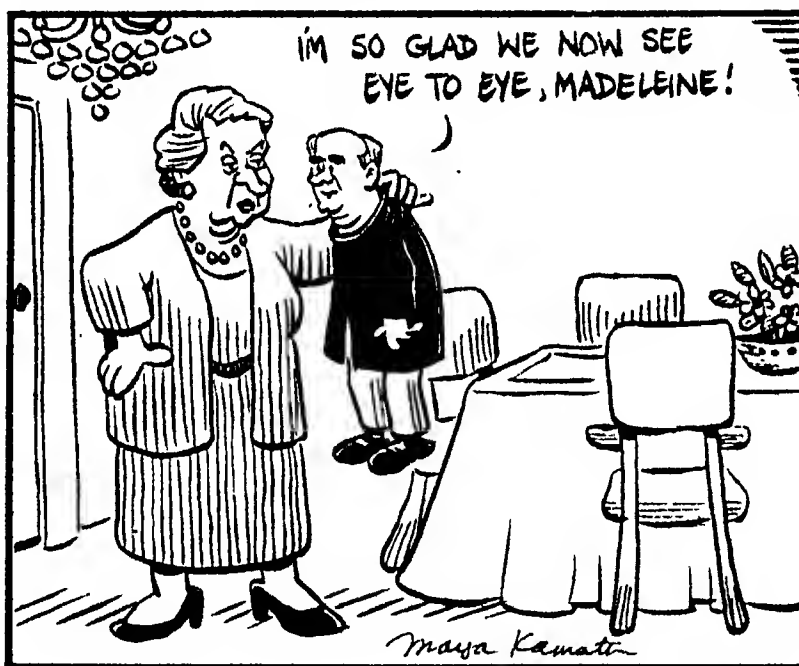
the Indian cricket team, on 28 July. He replaces Mohammad Azharuddin.

UNVEILED: a statue of Maharajah Duleep Singh, the last Sikh ruler of Punjab, in Norfolk, UK, by the Prince of Wales, on 29 July.

AWARDED: to Martin Kampchen, visiting fellow at Santiniketan, the Order of Merit of the German Federal Government, for his "singular dedication to the friendship between India and Germany".

CHOOSEN: Dr Verghese Kurien, architect of India's white revolution, for the prestigious Paulo Mar Gregorio Award for 1999, in recognition of his pioneering work in community-based development and cooperative movement.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ We have gained new respect for the political courage and leadership of Prime Minister Vajpayee, whose strict discipline and restraint in the face of pressures for escalation enabled the crisis to be resolved.

KARL I N D E R F U R T H, US assistant-secretary of state, on Atal Behari Vajpayee's handling of the Kargil crisis

■ The Vajpayee government must own moral responsibility for its failure to check Pakistani intrusion into Kargil. Under this government, even the borders of the country have become unsafe.

S O N I A G A N D H I, Congress president



■ Is this what democracy is? I pity a democracy that took away my right to vote. Long live democracy!

B A L T H A C K E R A Y, Shiv Sena chief, after being debarred by the Election Commission from casting his vote and contesting polls till December 2001

■ We are facing a situation where, if we do not wake up, we will definitely land in an internal debt trap, with over 40 per cent of revenue going for interest payments.

Y A S H W A N T S I N H A, Union finance minister

■ He has been saying he will for a long time but he is still around. Nobody can retire without the party's permission.

H A R K I S H E N S I N G H S U R J E E T, CPI(M) general-secretary, on Jyoti Basu's 'retirement plans'

■ I wish some people would use ink instead of poison in their pens.

M A D H U R I D I X I T, film star, on gossip columnists



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Can this man be defeated?

Mani-Talk vs SUNDAY



Of course, he can be. Moreover, of course, he should be. In an association of close on ten years with this magazine as a weekly columnist, I have, inevitably, disagreed with its

editorial line on many an occasion. But rarely as violently as I have with its 'cover story' in the last issue of July, gushingly entitled: *Can This Man Be Defeated?*

We are told that Vajpayee, "thankfully for India", is the "right man" at the "right time". Vajpayee has used his prime ministerial prerogative to refuse to be drawn into a debate on Kargil. Yes, the war is won. But should the war ever have happened? Can the Prime Minister who has let us into a wholly-preventable war have any claim to being the right man at the right time? Possibly, yes. But that certificate can be given only after we are able to establish that it was Pakistani chicanery alone, not our own negligence of national security, which brought on the war. For if our negligence contributed to the loss of 400 precious lives in a war that should never have occurred, then the Prime Minister and his government are accountable to the people, the country, and Parliament

The forum for accountability is Parliament. The right man at the right time

refuses to do the right thing and convene the Rajya Sabha. He says he does not want to explain to the Rajya Sabha how he has proved the right man at the right time because he lacks a majority in the House! Can a Prime Minister who refuses to be responsible to the institutions of democracy be the right man at the right time in a democracy?

Atal Behari Vajpayee has taken this country to a diplomatic and defence disaster. We have been rescued from this disaster at an enormous cost in human life by our armed forces. And by the Bofors gun

There is now an irrefutable mountain of evidence pointing to the government having been in possession of raw intelligence that for over a year at least the Pakistanis were planning and executing their most massive incursion across the Line of Control in a generation. Every magazine — but not the SUNDAY cover story — is asking whether that raw intelligence was evaluated and assessed. If it was not, then why was it not assessed? And if it was, then how can a Prime Minister who went so hopelessly wrong in assessing the greatest danger to national security in 27 years be the right man at the right time?

DOES VAJPAYEE SHARE the view of

his defence minister that the "danger to national security from Pakistan" is a "myth"? If not, why did he appoint such a man Raksha Mantri? And why does he persist in retaining him even after George Fernandes' asinine views on national security threats have been "exploded" (George's colourful expression re. the Pakistan "myth", not mine)? Why sack the communications minister for telling the truth and retain as defence minister this monument to untruth? And if the reason for this curious paradox is that Vajpayee is of the same view as George, then how can such a disaster be describ-





ed as the right man at the right time?

SUNDAY, of course, took the Bus to Lahore. At the invitation of Vajpayee. But after *Mani-Talk* had warned that nothing would come of it, indeed after I wrote from Lahore, in the only cover story I have been privileged to file for SUNDAY, that 'The Thaw' was a myth waiting to be exploded. Vajpayee has dolefully confessed that the Bus to Lahore has ended in Kargil. SUNDAY's job, I submit, is not to giggle at the witticism but ask how it is that a man who is such a simpleton, such a naive dupe in diplomacy, can possibly be anything but the

wrong man at the wrong time. Vajpayee is certainly qualified to be a poetaster. But not a Prime Minister. Certainly not after his disaster in diplomacy is being mourned in 400 homes. Who is going to bring back their sons?

Disaster in diplomacy has been compounded by disaster in defence. Making friends with Pakistan was not wrong. Lowering the nation's guard when embracing the nation's enemy was. The only comparable initiative to Vajpayee's Bus to Lahore was Rajiv Gandhi's Boeing to Beijing. SUNDAY must have been on the flight. Was not defence on the frontiers with China assiduously strengthened from the Sumdorongchu clash of 1985 to the take-off for China in 1988? Is not the strengthening of fences a sound principle in preparing to end confrontation? Why did the Prime Minister not demand that every shred of intelligence on Pakistan's intentions be thoroughly evaluated before rousing the emotions that the Bus was bound to raise — the positive emotions of friendship and cooperation as much as the negative emotions of ancient grudges and revanchist revenge?

If the Prime Minister called for such an assessment, how could Brig. Surendra Singh's six successive reports (scooped by a SUNDAY rival) have been missed? How could the MI reports have been missed? How could state intelligence reports have been missed? How could the RAW chief be rewarded with a Governorship for not knowing that the Pakis were all over the place? Or is it, as RAW claims in its defence, that RAW is in Ladakh only to keep a beady eye on the Chinese, not the Pakistanis? If so, why did the Prime Minister, to whom RAW directly reports, fail to order RAW to check out on the mischief in the Kargil sector being reported by other, less sophisticated, agencies? How on earth can SUNDAY hold such a gullible, bumbling, immature, incompetent and irresponsible Prime Minister to be the right man at the right time?

VAJPAYEE RETURNED TO Delhi to hosannas of praise from the unbelievably childish horde of journalists who went with him to Wagah. He knew the Pakistani chiefs of staff had deliberately snubbed India (and friendship with India) by their calculated insult of not being at Wagah when the Indian Prime Minister arrived at the border for his five

minutes of fame. What did the Prime Minister do to block the danger to national security from the Pak armed forces? As far as the public record goes, and in the face of Vajpayee's refusal to convene the Rajya Sabha, *nothing*. Absolutely zilch. If Vajpayee did do something, the nation has the right to know. Just how did he prove himself, from March to May, to be the right man at the right time? What was the Prime Minister — our resident lotus-eater — doing during the 60 days, post-Lahore, that Pakistan infiltrated 3,000 men, heavily armed and bountifully supplied, into 800 square kilometres of Indian territory?

The official government stand is that they knew nothing, saw nothing, heard nothing for all those 60 days. I do not believe for one second that Vajpayee was merely imitating Gandhiji's monkeys. He heard. He saw. He knew. But he would not speak. For if he had confessed that on the morning after his night out in Lahore the Pakistanis had invaded India, his government would have fallen before Pramod Mahajan's birthday bash. For it is precisely during the mad month of March, when SUNDAY was abusing Mohan Guruswamy and denigrating Admiral Bhagwat (or was it the other way round?), that Atal Behari Vajpayee — the "right man" (ha! ha!) at the "right time" (ha! ha!) — was deliberately withholding from the country the ugly reality that the Pakis had taken him for a ride. And if that charge is unfounded, why is the Prime Minister shying away from clearing himself on the floor of the Rajya Sabha?

Vajpayee has taken this country to a diplomatic and defence disaster. We have been rescued from this disaster — at an enormous cost in human life — by our armed forces. And by the Bofors gun. SUNDAY seems to think the issue is the diplomatic and defence handling of the war. It is not — at any rate, that is not the central issue. For, with regard to all our wars, from Kashmir 1947-48 to Kargil 1999, there is no dispute over which we won and which we did not. The issue at test now is whether Prime Minister Vajpayee is not the blindest ruler India has had since Dhritarashtra.

Can this man be defeated? Of course, he can. Of course, he must. Of course, he will be. Watch this space in October. •

(This column is being suspended till the polling in Mayiladuturai on 4 September, as the columnist takes off to prove SUNDAY hopelessly wrong.)

Auto system

The Centre decides to set up a foreign investment authority



The Government of India has decided to set up a foreign investment authority for the smooth clearance of various proposals for direct foreign investment in the country. A right step provided the new authority enjoys enough power to control the various government departments and the bureaucracy.

Though the process of economic reforms and liberalisation is continuing, the mindset of most of our government officials is yet to change. Their attitude is negative and they block most of the proposals in their typical babu style. I think the Cabinet committee on appointments must ascertain before clearing any name either for joint secretary, additional secretary or secretary that the officer concerned has a good reputation and

not someone who sits on files only.

These bureaucrats, who may be honest, have destroyed the Indian economy to a large extent. They look at every proposal with suspicion, only calculating how much money the party concerned is making without realising how much benefit the nation is going to get.

Nowadays, the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) has cleared most of the applications and passed almost all the projects barring a few having technical problems. This year, the FIPB is hoping for investments worth four billion dollars, while next year its target is expected to be around ten billion dollars.

FIPB chairman Ajit Kumar, who is also secretary, industrial development, has developed a system by which nobody has to hang around in the board's office. According to this auto system, if your application fulfils the desired requirements, permission will reach you automatically. Which means a great deal of

relief for foreign investors, who earlier had to run from pillar to post to get clearance, especially during A.N. Verma's time.

The main problem in our system is such that you are required to obtain 28 clearances after acquiring the FIPB clearance. There are several central as well as state government departments that either do not provide no objection certificates or clearances to utilise the facilities. These are the areas where most of the proposals get stuck and investors have to pay bribes to get a clearance.

That's why only 30 per cent of the projects have been set up after FIPB clearance. Land, sales tax, excise, customs, environment, revenue departments, besides the RBI and the DGFT, are the few areas where the applications are bound to get stuck.

With a lot of effort, Ajit Kumar has been able to set up this authority, having members of various departments including secretaries of commerce, urban development, power, steel, law and company affairs, environment, etc. besides the states' chief secretaries. There are representatives from the RBI and other institutions, too.

Now, it will be the responsibility of the authority to ensure smooth passage for foreign investment. There is also a suggestion to appoint a bureaucrat at the joint secretary level on each proposal and it will be his responsibility to get clearances for the investor.

Recently, there were proposals for setting up departmental stores and shopping malls on the lines of the European metropolitan cities. Though the FIPB wanted to clear these proposals, commerce secretary P.P. Prabhu blocked them saying they would cause damage to small shopkeepers, little realising that the clientele of a shopping mall is altogether different.

According to an estimate, Indians invest around 800 million pounds in shopping abroad every year especially in London. All this could be easily saved by creating good departmental stores with quality stuff. It would also attract tourists from far and near. •

FIPB chairman Ajit Kumar has developed a system by which nobody has to hang around. If your application fulfils the desired requirements, permission will reach you automatically



Ajit Kumar: great effort

Diplomatic coup

But India should not be too euphoric too soon



Indian diplomacy has good reason to pat itself on the back. Especially after the heroic fighting by the Indian armed forces was supplemented by Pakistan's diplomatic isolation to force Nawaz Sharif to withdraw the Pakistani forces from Kargil. A further shot in the arm for the South Block has been the series of useful and productive

meetings foreign minister Jaswant Singh has had, on the fringes of the Singapore meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum, with his opposite numbers from a number of countries, especially the United States, China, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

However, it would be a grievous error on our part to be too euphoric too soon. Signs of wild and exaggerated expectations of a sea change in the American policy on South Asia are much too visible. A large section of opinion-makers, with its mindset still firmly rooted in the past when the US habitually tilted towards Pakistan, is screaming that this country should beware of Americans when they come bearing diplomatic gifts.

In my view, both extreme views ought to be rejected. Something has definitely changed in the India-America equation. Over the issue of Kargil, the US generally, and Bill Clinton personally, were relentless in telling Nawaz Sharif that Pakistan was the aggressor, that it must withdraw from the Indian side of the LoC, and that it must also commit itself to respecting the sanctity of the LoC in Jammu and Kashmir. Only after this was done, said Clinton, would he want the Lahore process for the settlement of all India-Pakistan issues, including Kashmir, to be revived again. Of course, he also "promised" to take a "personal interest" in the acceleration and intensification of the Delhi-Islamabad dialogue under the Lahore rubric.

It is the latter part of Clinton's statement that has started alarm bells ringing in New Delhi. The US President's "personal interest" is perceived as the proverbial thin end of the wedge that would inevitably lead to foreign (read: American) mediation over Kashmir.

What lends an edge to this apprehension is the near certainty that Pakistan will strain every nerve to raise the Kashmir issue in some form or the other in the UN General Assembly which will begin its session at the precise moment when this country would be in the throes of a bitterly-fought election. At the same time, to avenge the defeat, both military and diplomatic, in Kargil, Pakistan can be expected to escalate recklessly the reign of terror in not only J&K but also elsewhere.

Jaswant Singh has used every opportunity, especially at Singapore (where Russia also offered to help bring India and Pakistan closer together), to reject third party mediation and to reiterate that Kashmir and all other Indo-Pak problems will be settled only bilaterally. This is good as far as it goes. But does it go far enough? For, developing contours of international reality cannot be ignored.

The Americans are the first to proclaim that they have no

intention of being the mediators between India and Pakistan. But they are making no bones about their resolve to be "facilitators" of a settlement between the two neighbours who have newly brought into the open the nuclear weaponry that both had possessed for nearly a decade. Consequently, the challenge before Indian diplomacy is not to avert foreign "meddling" in Kashmir but to convert the great and growing international interest in Kashmir to its advantage.

The point to ponder is that America does not take a pro-India or pro-Pakistan policy because of its love for either country. All its stances are dictated by the cold calculation of its own national interest.



Jaswant Singh has used every opportunity to reject third-party mediation and to reiterate that Kashmir and all other Indo-Pak problems will be settled bilaterally

As it happens, some American interests, such as curbing of Islamic fundamentalism and its nefarious nexus with narco-terrorism, climaxed by American concern over the activities of Osama bin Laden, happen to coincide our major concerns. In fact, for nearly two decades, since the Pakistan-backed terrorism in Punjab that was later extended to the proxy war in Kashmir, New Delhi has been trying hard to persuade the Americans, as leaders of the "international community", to take note of this threat to the international order. Only now have the Americans agreed to do so. The second problem we have is the resumption of the dialogue on Kashmir with Pakistan. Do we have a nationally-backed strategy for this dialogue? The question is of supreme importance and must be discussed separately. •

A HUSBAND SCORNE

Bangladesh's eminent nuclear scientist falls out with his Prime Minister wife

MA. Wazed Mia, Bangladesh's eminent nuclear scientist and husband of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, usually maintains a low profile. But last month, he hit the headlines when he kicked and broke the headlight of a 3.5-million-taka jeep at Ganobhaban, the official residence of the PM, and seized documents of a car belonging to his former office, Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC).

Explaining his conduct later, he urged Hasina to look into the allegations of corruption brought by him against BAEC officials and some members of the PM's personal staff.

In a press interview, Wazed Mia said: "My points are simple. How could the science and technology minister and the secretary of the ministry use a vehicle

for other purposes bought exclusively for the Roopur atomic plant? Secondly, how could the Prime Minister's assistant private secretary, who is not even a deputy secretary, use a car worth 5.5 million taka (US \$70,000) just within three years of his assignment?" On the other hand, he said, he retired early this year with only 1.8 million taka (US \$30,000) as pension after 35 years of government service.

Two officials of the BAEC met Wazed

Mia at Ganobhaban later to take back the movement register and the registration papers of the car which were seized by him. But he said he would only hand over the documents to the BAEC chairman. He also denied having badly damaged the official car of the assistant private secretary when the driver refused to give him a lift to the BAEC office. "I hit the headlight with my toe and it got damaged," he said.

Wazed said that the movement



Wazed Mia and Sheikh Hasina: unequal partners

Wazed said that the life of a PM's husband could never be normal in the traditional sense. "There are a lot of rules and restrictions which I must abide by"

ASHOK MAJUMDER

register seized by him contained a lot of irregular and illegal entries. He said the vehicle was illegally taken to faraway Saint Martin's Island by the minister concerned.

Besides, the PM's husband also demanded that Hasina should look into how her bodyguard could build a four-storeyed house at Mohammadpur in Dhaka within three years of her rule. "Small corruption leads to larger corruption. Ours is a small country. We cannot afford even the smallest corruption," said Wazed.

Wazed Mia, who retired from government service in February, last month joined the People's University at Savar founded by liberation fighter Zafrullah Chowdhury as a professor.

He said that the life of a Prime Minister's husband could never be a normal one in the traditional sense. He and Hasina got married 32 years ago. "There are a lot of rules and restrictions which I must abide by," he said. For instance, "I have been requested not to make any comment against the Prime Minister in presence of government officials in Ganobhaban. I have recently been asked not to take any guest upstairs where I live." Hasina lives in a separate room on the same floor.

He disclosed that he would leave Ganobhaban shortly. "I will go back to my house at Dhanmondi carrying with me all my books," he said.

Wazed Mia has utter contempt for Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, the bureaucrat turned state minister for planning, whom he accuses of creating a rift between him and his wife by fetching for her a number of honorary doctorate degrees from abroad.

"Mokha [Alamgir] has mesmerised my wife," he remarked at a seminar organised in Dhaka by the Bangladesh Journalists Association on 10 July. He also warned that the bureaucrats in Bangladesh were preparing to push Hasina out of power as they did in the case of Begum Khaleda Zia in 1996.

Following his outbursts, government agencies have been alerted to keep a watch on Wazed Mia.

During his recent trip to Bogra, the administration was extra cautious. When he went to attend a function there, the police told him that his car was running short of fuel and therefore, he must cancel his programme. He, however, attended the function and spoke bitterly



Filo picture of Wazed and Hasina with their children: album from the bygone days

"Small corruption leads to larger corruption. Ours is a small country. We cannot afford even the smallest corruption," said Wazed Mia

about efforts to restrict his movement

At one place in Bogra, organisers asked journalists to leave when Wazed started talking about his personal life. At this he became furious and asked newsmen to stay saying there was complete press freedom in the country.

He said Mujib used to consider him as his own son, being the eldest son-in-law. "I virtually became the guardian of the Mujib family after the killings of all except Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana," he pointed out.

He said he was not sure whether he would ever be able to return to Bangladesh after the couple took political asylum in India. "The Indian government, too, did not assure us whether it could send us back to Bangladesh, nor did it tell how long we could remain in political asylum in India."

During his stay in India, he had applied to the Shah of Iran for a job at the Iranian nuclear plant but the Khomeini group did not allow Teheran to provide him a job.

Wazed expressed his gratitude to former President Ziaur Rahman for paving

the way for his return to Dhaka. "Zia had told me that he would protect me and Hasina at the cost of his life. But alas, Zia sacrificed his life, not for me but due to a coup." As Sheikh Mujib would remain alive in the minds of millions in Bangladesh, so would Ziaur Rahman, Hasina's husband said.

He said that neither the ruling Awami League nor the Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party should consider Bangladesh as its sole property. "I do not believe in doing politics by wearing a headscarf after performing the Haj," Wazed commented, indirectly pointing to his wife's practice. He also criticised the BNP saying that there must not be any politicking with "Bismillah" -- a non-Muslim is not bound to say Bismillah even constitutionally.

Wazed told journalists in Bogra angrily that the police and the administration were always concerned with where he would go, what he would say and what he would do. "But I want to make it clear that I now serve under none. I fear none," he said.

In an intriguing development, Jawadul Karim, the Prime Minister's press secretary, in a letter published in the Hong Kong-based *Asiaweek*, has asked the editor to call the Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and not Sheikh Hasina Wazed. All foreign missions of Bangladesh have reportedly made similar requests.

Does it mean that Hasina has retaliated against her husband silently and diplomatically? •

Rahman Jahangir/Dhaka

Uddhav Thackeray's birthday has, traditionally, been a low-key affair. However, this 27 July, Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray's youngest son's 40th birthday was celebrated with much fanfare. Hundreds of party workers and leaders from in and around Bombay trooped into 'Matoshree' (the Thackeray home) to greet him. Some of them were even "summoned" for the occasion. For this was a birthday party with a difference. It was a show of strength; an event to prove a political point or two. And the person at whom it was all directed was Uddhav's cousin, Raj Thackeray.

On 23 July, the rivalry between the Sena scions became public when Raj spoke out against Uddhav's growing prominence and dominance. Raj's supporters then roughed up three Sena members believed to be close to Bal Thackeray's son and Subhash Desai, the party's general secretary and an Uddhav loyalist. The next day, Raj's supporters held an hour-long *dharna* outside his residence to express solidarity with their leader and to urge him to play a more active role in party matters.

Alarmed by the turn of events, the Sena supremo rushed in with predictable crisis-management measures. The feuding cousins enacted a public reconciliation with Raj stating that, "We do not want power, (so) there is no question of fighting for power. Neither of us has any desire to be chief minister." Uddhav, meanwhile, said that "family relations were more important" to him and if there was a tussle for power between them, "he would rather quit politics".

But with the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls due in September, some damage has already been done. Sena observers feel that the "forced truce" between the younger Thackerays is, at best, "momentary". The two cousins have long been engaged in a game of oneupmanship. For instance, in 1997, Raj had organised a massive rally at the Sena Bhavan on the midnight of 14 August to celebrate 50 years of Independence. Not to be outdone, Thackeray Jr held a mega convention of party office-bearers two weeks later. In January this year, Uddhav, an avid photographer, held an exhibition of his wildlife collection. Only a few days later, Raj responded with an exhibition of his



THE INN

Uddhav vs Raj: the fight



cartoons. And now, Uddhav's birthday bash was aimed at Raj's supporters who had claimed that Bal Thackeray's youngest son lacked support at the grassroot level.

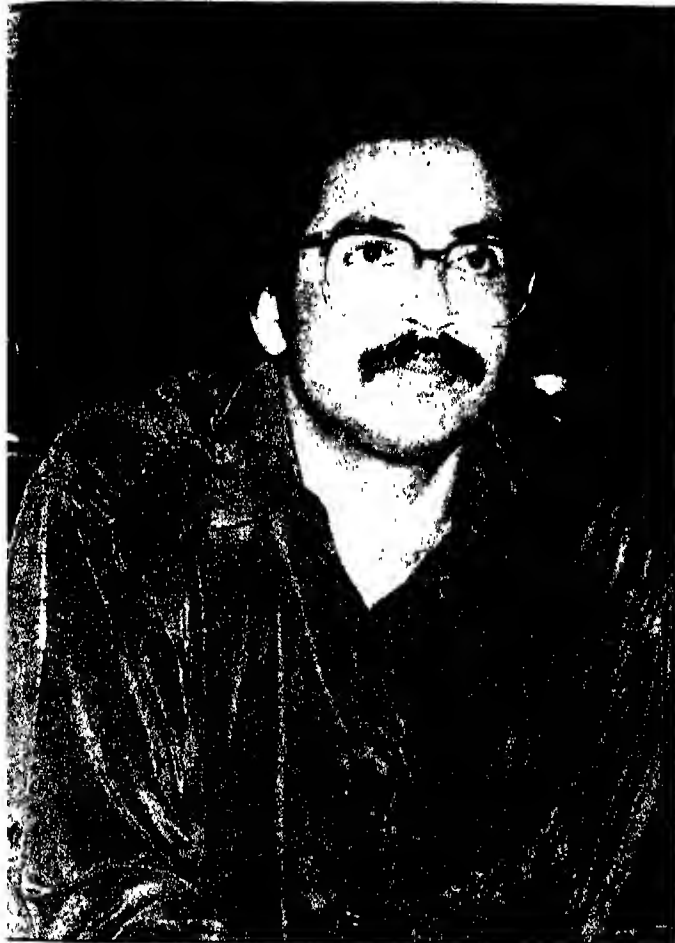
According to Chhagan Bhujbal, Sena defector and now state chief of the Nationalist Congress Party, "The Sena is on the path of liquidation and as it happens in all partnerships and family businesses, there is a fight for a lion's share. Everyone remains united as long as they have power but when it begins to slip away, the fight begins since nobody wants to take the responsibility."

But the 'family feud' is a recent phenomenon. Raj, literally, grew up in his uncle's household and enjoyed a strong bond of friendship with Uddhav, who is seven years older to him. This bond was further strengthened when both of them joined JJ School of Arts in Bombay—Uddhav for a degree in photogra-

Bal Thackeray: though the Sena chief feels that his nephew has a "natural flair for politics", he will ultimately hand over the crown to his son

ERITORS

r the Thackeray throne



phy and Raj for a course in commercial arts. They later started their own advertising agencies besides working for *Saamna*, the official mouthpiece of the Shiv Sena started in 1989. While Raj donned the role of cartoonist, Uddhav managed administrative affairs.

Raj took an early plunge into politics when he was elected president of the Bharatiya Vidyarthi Sena, the party's student wing. Uddhav, a quintessential family man, made a somewhat-reluctant entry into mainstream politics in 1992 at the behest of his late mother Meenatai who was concerned about her husband's failing health.

The brothers worked in tandem for the 1992 civic polls as well as the 1995 Assembly elections. However, this equation altered soon after the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government rode to power in Maharashtra and Matoshree became the power centre. A bitter power play between Raj and Uddhav began, within the party and in the government.

"While Uddhav's political graph has risen steadily, Raj's has dipped dramatically," comments a partyman. Raj's fall, some feel, began with the Ramesh Kini murder case in 1996.

"Even though no charges were proved against him, Balasaheb was not very convinced of his innocence. So, to keep him away from the party organisation, he was put in charge of the Shiv Udyog Sena (SUS)," reveals a Sena insider.

A late starter, Uddhav has gradually gained in strength and grown in stature. He began cutting into his cousin's sphere of influence till Raj was left with nothing but the youth employment scheme, by mid-'97. In the 1997 civic polls, Uddhav deliberately struck off the names of Raj's candidates and replaced them with his own men. According to Sena sources, the only reason why senior party leader and former MP Madhukar Sarpotdar was denied a berth in the Vajpayee ministry was his son's close proximity to Raj. The forests and environment portfolio went, instead, to Suresh Prabhu, a junior Sena MP and a close associate of Uddhav.

The crux of the problem lies in the organisational set-up of the Shiv Sena. The party has essentially remained a one-man show with Bal Thackeray calling all the shots. Over the last couple of years, Raj and Uddhav have starred in an intriguing succession drama. But now, Uddhav has clearly emerged as the frontrunner. With his father getting on in years, Uddhav enjoys a say in most important party matters. According to insiders, though the Sena chief feels that Raj (who has inherited his mantle of cartoonist) has a "natural flair for politics", he will ultimately hand over the crown to his natural heir, Uddhav.

"If the rift between the two brothers is to be controlled, power in the party needs to be decentralised by delegating responsibilities to more leaders," says a Sena veteran. Raj, acutely aware of his growing marginalisation within the party, has already complained to the Sena supremo that he has no role in the process of selecting candidates for the forthcoming elections.

"The party needs both of them for their obvious merits," feels a Shiv Sainik. "Raj has inherited his uncle's looks, crowd-pulling charisma and oratorical skills. He is also the only Sena

"The party needs both of them for their obvious merits. Raj (left) has inherited his uncle's looks, charisma and oratorical skills. Uddhav is more politically mature and a shrewd strategist," says a Shiv Sainik

leader who has campaigned throughout the state. Uddhav, on the other hand, is more politically mature and a shrewd behind-the-scenes strategist."

But Madhav Deshpande, one of the founding members of the Sena, warns that the Thackeray family is capable of ruining the party. And with the ongoing battle of the blood brothers, the end could come sooner, rather than later. Nikhil Wagle, editor of *Apla Mahanagar* and a known Sena-baiter sums it up: "You can safely write Shiv Sena's obituary along-with Bal Thackeray's. After his death, the party is bound to disintegrate into various factions like the Republican Party India, and you might end up with a Shiv Sena (Uddhav) and Shiv Sena (Raj)." •

Kaajal Walla/Bombay

LAST YEAR'S WINNERS.





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make a difference. And while last year it

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won the first edition of the award (instituted

by Businessworld, FICCI-Socio Economic

Development Foundation and Compaq), we

believe the real winners lay elsewhere. In the

villages, homes and families that were made

self-reliant. In the smiles that accompanied

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of achievement when a seed planted prospered. It is this

social conscience that the award applauds. The desire to

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REMAINS OF THE RAJ

Calcutta's Anglo-Indian community comes alive on a London stage

Stories about Anglo-Indians — the last vestiges of the Raj and the most westernised of Indian communities who never forgave the English for leaving India — have been told, written, filmed and performed over and over again. Recently, a play featuring that hybrid race of people produced from mixed marriages between Europeans and Indians in the days when this country was still a British colony, opened in London, in a premier West End production.

The play begins in a crumbling colonial bungalow covered with jasmines in Dum Dum, Calcutta. The residents are a scatty bunch of elderly Anglo-Indians, alienated from the modern-day world and virtually living in the past. British Asian playwright Ayub Khan-Din's latest play, *Last Dance at Dum Dum*, focuses on the lonely and isolated world of the Anglo-Indian community — one created by the Raj but spurned by its creators when they left India and rejected by the native Indians for being half-caste. The time is 1981, and the small community is now confronted with another phenomenon, the rise of Hindu communalism in the neighbourhood.

Muriel Marsh (played by actress-cum-cookery writer Madhur Jaffrey) is a 66-year-old Anglo-Indian, suffering from brain tumour. She throws tantrums every time the Bengali neighbour Mr Chakravarty (Madhav Sharma) has one of his RSS-organised *shakhas* (meetings) at his place. The head of the household is Daphne Willows (played by Avril Elgar), also in her sixties. Circumstances force Daphne to mortgage the house to Chakravarty, who has every intention of grabbing it.

The other residents in the house are Violet Wallis (Shiela Burrell), who collects every picture, bust and memorabilia of English lords, viceroys and royalty with a vengeance, and Mr Jones (Rashid Karapiet) who is still grieving for his dead wife. The family cook, Elliot, likes to cross-dress and do Marilyn Monroe impersonations.

Muriel's tantrums get worse with the arrival of a new lodger, an English girl named Lydia. She avidly hates the English for deserting the Anglo-Indians

and is not prepared to put up with a *mem-saheb* in the same house. But when Lydia scuttles Chakravarty's devious plans, the residents prepare for a garden dance, with banners, lights and music, against the backdrop of communal tension.

Ayub Khan-Din's first play, *East is East*, was about the peculiar predicament faced by a young man, the son of

abandoned her.

One does not get any of the lovely sing-song Anglo-Indian accent, probably because Londoners would perhaps not be able to relate to it. The play also falls apart slightly at the end when the communal violence erupts into riots between students and RSS activists with Chakravarty caught in the middle. The BJP did not exist as a potent force so



***Last Dance at Dum Dum* focuses on the lonely and isolated world of the Anglo-Indians — a community created by the Raj but spurned by its creators when they left India and rejected by native Indians for being half-caste**

an English woman and a Pakistani man, and his search for an identity. *Last Dance...* is similar in that it is also about people who are struggling to come to terms with a loss of identity. The characters have been painted in a sympathetic light, despite their idiosyncracies. There is Mrs Jones, who imagined she was at Beachy Head every time she went to Gopalpur-on-Sea though she had never visited Beachy Head and had only seen it in picture post-cards; Violet, who hated the natives and had disowned her own daughter for marrying an Indian; and Daphne, endlessly moaning for Pondicherry and her French general who

much in 1981, the period the play is set in, as it is today.

In *East is East*, Khan-Din was on familiar territory in England, but with *Last Dance...* he is a bit at sea, having set his play in Calcutta where the intense political scenario is more Left-wing than BJP. Yet, on the whole, *Last Dance...* turns out to be a very enjoyable production, with an excellent cast and a moving story-line about a lonely and derelict community which has been living on the edge, for as long as one can remember. •

Shrabani Basu/London

Nirad C. Chaudhuri

In her introduction to a book by Amiya Chaudhuri, Amita Malik had quipped that the author had had to put up with an 'acerbic husband' for a long time. The husband in question is, of course, Nirad C. Chaudhuri whose death last Sunday at his Oxford home is being mourned internationally by his friends and admirers. Malik's choice of the word 'acerbic' suits no less any description of Niradbabu as author. In his long career as writer since he published *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* in 1951, Niradbabu has evoked extreme reactions in the minds of a wide variety of educated Indians, especially Bengalis. His detractors called him names privately and openly dismissed his achievements as a trifle too meagre.

He has indeed written nothing that has not drawn flak from his critics and even from his admirers. He has made stinging comments on our nationalist politics, our leaders and intellectuals, our wars with Pakistan and China, and has not spared even our most widely worshipped national icons — Gandhiji and Netaji. He has had the perverse capacity to bounce back in reckoning — however much we tried to ignore him — with the publication of each new book, always raved about in the British and American press.

Over the years, there has been a certain shift in our attitude towards him. We have come around to accept him, on his own terms, as a writer of no mean power, 'a master of English prose' who could choose his words and phrases which best displayed his razor-sharp wit and intellect. We have also discovered more virtues in his dogged adherence to his own views, however unpopular, than in the frequent changing of political affiliations and ideologies by many of our veterans whom we had once highly overrated. Chaudhuri's death news last Monday became a front-page item in all the leading dailies, and each of them carried long obits written often in effusive language.



(1897-1999)

Chaudhuri was born in a remote district town of Kishoreganj in Mymensingh (now in Bangladesh). He had developed a deep attachment to its green riverine landscape, which showed whenever he wrote about the place, recalling it in vivid nostalgic detail. He left Kishoreganj finally in 1927 but never felt quite at home in any other place. Even in Oxford, where he spent the last 29 years of his life, he felt 'deracinated'.

His schooling began in Kishoreganj (in no English-medium school!) and continued in Calcutta. Though born in 1897, Niradbabu was a true product of the 19th Century Indo-British cultural encounter that brought new learning and enlightenment, at least for the native elite. But the encounter was nearly over by the time he came to Calcutta as a ten-year-old boy. In his tens and twenties, Niradbabu grew up in Calcutta, imbibing a Renaissance inheritance, as he watched with horror the incipient decadence all around him, which he successfully resisted in his personal life with singular and determined effort.

He cared little for a straitjacket formal education though he got a first, majoring in history in his BA. What mattered to him were his diverse intellectual pursuits. He spared himself no pain to master every discipline that interested him, be it Greek history or French and German literature; Western or Indian classical music; art or ornithology; bookbinding or typography. This he did with no worldly prospect in view, urged solely by a disinterested humanist thirst for knowledge. The upshot was a spell of grinding poverty, which plagued his life till the end of the Thirties — long after he married Amiya Chaudhurani in 1932. But this did not frighten him into submission, nor forced him to flinch from his ideal that uncriticised life is not worth living. Instead of dissipating in frustration, he emerged all the stronger, forming staunchly independent views and courageously expressing them against the majority opinion. In 1928, he worked briefly as assistant editor of *The Modern Review* and later, worked as the personal secretary of Sharat Chandra Bose. This was the opportunity to watch national leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose from close quarters and study in detail the trends of the nationalist movement. This experience has been documented in the second part of his autobiography, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch*, published on his 90th birthday.

In 1937, Chaudhuri was working as a radio commentator on international affairs in Bengali, but joined the All India Radio only in 1942, in Delhi. During the war, when our nationalists gleefully welcomed Nazi victories and thought Hitler was fighting our war against the British, Niradbabu supported the latter in his radio commentaries. He was, nevertheless, a suspect in the eyes of the British government for his association with the leaders of the nationalist movement and his public exposure of the despicable anti-Indian stand of the local government officials and the British community.

Working rigorously for four months, he completed a manuscript. Determined not to publish the book in India he sent it to London, to an agent who would find him a prestigious publisher. When Macmillan published the book in 1951, it became an instant success and almost overnight, Nirad C. Chaudhuri became an author of international fame.



The book was greeted with unending fusillades of abuse in the Indian press. At a time when nationalist euphoria was at its peak in the wake of achieving Independence, Chaudhuri's book upheld British imperialism, bemoaning its disappearance, blaming the revivalist Hindu nationalism for impeding the process of progress that had a spectacular beginning in the 19th Century. But nothing — heaps of abuse and ridicule, personal harassments by government officials, another spell of poverty — could stop him from swimming against the current.

His next book, *A Passage to England* (1959), a stimulating and vivid account of his first six-week trip to England and France, proved that *Autobiography...*

was not an one-off success. Writing in *The Guardian*, Bernard Levin found in "this blazing, humbling book... an intellect which would be outstanding in any society". "He writes English like an angel," wrote *The New Statesman*. *The Continent of Circe* (1965), won him the Duff Cooper Prize, awarded for the first time to an Asian author. His first major book in Bengali, *Bangali Jibone Ramoni* (Women in Bengali Life), was released in 1968. Written with a profound understanding of the women who figure in the life and literature of Bengal, the essay is an extremely readable historical document.

Chaudhuri left Delhi in 1970 and settled in Oxford. He had gone to England primarily for research work in the Bodleian Library. He had been commissioned to write a life of Maxmueller by a renowned British publisher. In Oxford, he was at his most productive as an author. Within a span of 27 years, he wrote countless articles for the British and Indian press and published four major works in English — *The Scholar Extraordinary* (1974), *Clive of India* (1975), *Hinduism* (1979), *Thy Hand, Great Anarch* (1987) and *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* (1997).

He had managed to retain his verve, edgy wit and sharp intellect despite his advancing years and failing health. With an 'old man's frenzy', he scathingly criticised the decadence, not only of the Bengalis and Indians but also of the British and the Western culture. Age never mellowed him — he never softened his attitude, nor budged an inch from the radical views he had expressed in his early writings. His angry Jeremiahs, however, had their roots, in his passionate attachment to his own people and culture and at the same time to Western culture which, in his own time, was represented by the British.

Niradbabu had a phenomenal memory. He never kept any notes or diary. Everything that he wrote about his life and public events in India and abroad, besides all the quotes from varied texts that frequently occur in his writings, were all recalled from memory. Everytime I visited him in Oxford, he would regale me by reciting songs and lyrics, even cantos from epics. He would quote passages of prose freely to illustrate his point while discussing topics which could be anything from the antiquity of Sanskrit language to the Vulgate Bible. •

Manasij Majumder/Calcutta



"Although man's body is perishable, his mind is not. It's immortal"

Nirad C. Chaudhuri on the riddles of human existence

Nirad C. Chaudhuri never got over the death of Amiya Chaudhuri — his wife of 62 years — in 1994. When Nikhil Sarkar, senior journalist, Anandabazar Patrika, sent him a letter of condolence, Chaudhuri wrote back, sharing with Sarkar his ideas about death and man's purpose in the grand design of this inscrutable world. It was Chaudhuri's express wish that the document be published only after his death. "You will do me justice as well as a great favour if you publish this letter with the news of my death," the note read. Translated excerpts:

I began thinking about death from an early age. All my life I have been doing that, for I had the idea that it is impossible to live without coming to terms with death. I have written a lot on the subject, circulated my opinions on it, but all that had to do with my own death, I had not thought about the deaths of other people. But it is one thing to hold forth on death and quite another to see it happening...

In my young days I had read a comment by Sir Thomas Browne, — "The Night of Time far surpasseth the Day." But that doesn't mean that

the world itself differentiates between the two. The world will remain the same through all time to come. The comment is applicable only to the existence of human beings on earth. What it means is that to human beings, the duration of the sunlit daytime of the living is far less than the no-moon darkness of the dead. What man is left with are only the memories of the dead and the meetings with the living...

So far, I had been engrossed in the daytime of the living; I never thought of the dark nights of eternity. From that day* on, although my

physical existence is in the realm of the day, my mind has travelled to that of the night...

Since I consider my life as a property vested in a temple trust, I see no reason why I should end it or think of it as of no consequence... I am writing all the time because of this conviction; I have plans for a book in English**. I do not know if I'll be able to do that, but one never knows...

But now I have a particular problem which I cannot solve, and I don't think I ever will. And that is... When one thinks of the highest duties of man, surely it seems that man is the world's 'chosen one'. The things that the world itself could not create, and probably never can, it has entrusted man with the duties of performing them. First, creating new matter — from the point of view of aesthetics, creating architecture, paintings, sculpture; from the functional point of view, creating machines of all kinds, from the lump of stone to the rocket. And then, the world has entrusted man with something greater — the task of creating a world of the mind.

The greatness of the mind's world lies in its ability to create matter, for that too took shape from his mind. Man has created literature using his mind's energy, he has developed an understanding of the world, and now is trying to control areas beyond the world. The Spanish imperialists vainly called the earth a 'non-sufficient orbis' (this world would not be sufficient). Modern man has made this old imperialism work. Although man's body is perishable, his mind is not. It's immortal.

Why then did the world punish mankind with death? As individuals, men are like sacrificial lambs to the world. The world makes him work to its own end and then kills him like a ruthless ascetic. One could say it's God's will. In my childhood, I had heard a devotional song — "O most passionate one, why are you so cruel?" Man will always ask this distressed question to the world, which will go unanswered. I too will die with the same question on my mind.

*The day Amiya Devi died

**These Horsemen of the Apocalypse



To the polls! To the polls!

LEADERS AND PARTIES GET READY FOR THE EXAMS

It was business as usual at the Congress headquarters at Akbar Road. The publicity committee was holding its daily meeting at 11 am in the media centre. The chairman of the committee, Kapil Sibal, was talking about the telecom scam. "We must coordinate with (Sitaram) Yechury on this," he told his colleagues. A few minutes later, a call was made to Gujarat Bhavan and the state legislature party leader was asked to come over. The committee had decided to raise the issue of attack on the minorities at that evening's press briefing.

In another room, Mani Shankar Aiyar's Man Friday, the much-maligned Venkat, was fishing out old newspaper clippings for former OSD, ministry of finance, Mohan Guruswamy's attack on the government. Apparently, Jagdish Tytler needed a copy. But in his room, Tytler was busy photocopying a picture of Atal Behari Vajpayee being fed a *laddoo* by the newly-elected chief minister of Haryana, Om Prakash Chautala. "Do you recall the names the BJP called this chap during Meham?" he told his colleagues. "And now, look at this."

Things weren't too different at the BJP office in Ashoka Road.

During one of the party's campaign committee meetings chaired by L.K. Advani, one of the BJP leaders fished out a cartoon that had appeared in *Newsweek*. This depicted the Pakistanis as moaning the fact that Sonia Gandhi had not been in power during Kargil, because, read the caption,



The campaign strategy of both camps is best summed up in one line: while the Congress wants this to be a Congress versus BJP campaign, the BJP would like this to be a Vajpayee versus Sonia battle

no Italian has ever won a war in the history of the world. And the likes of Advani, Venkatesh Naidu and Sushma Swaraj were chortling over this piece of witticism. After the meeting they trooped out, and solemnly assured the press, that, of course not, they would not make Sonia Gandhi's origins an election issue.

But Sonia knows that her nationality will be one of the issues that the BJP will

Writing on the wall

CONGRESS

• *Do you want the next elections in 2000 or 2004? Vote for the BJP and the next polls will be in 2000*

• *(Picture of a bus with Vajpayee perched on top with a rose between his teeth)*

*Bas ki rah thi lambi
Main to so raha tha
Ab tum hi batao mein kya karoo
Mujhe kya maloom
Kargil kab ho raha tha*

(The bus ride was very long so I went to sleep. How am I to know when Kargil happened?)

• *Explosion of Pokhran-I was felt in Islamabad
Explosion of Pokhran-II was felt in Kargil*

• *Sabko manana inka tha kaam
Ab tum hi batao, kaise samhuloo
Aloo piyaz ke daam*

(The government was so busy placating its allies, how could it control the prices of onions and potatoes?)

• *In India guest is God
That's why the Staines' children were murdered*

• *(Picture of Vajpayee caricatured as the blind Dhritrashtra)
Kyon hua Kargil?
Kyon hua Kargil?
(Why did Kargil happen?)*

BJP

• *Teesri baari Atal Behari*

• *(Poster with Italian words)
Can you read this?
She (Sonia) can't read Hindi. How will you communicate?*

• *Instead of Rasta Roko, it's Pasta Roko*

• *If India can, Vajpayee's the man*

• *We have a leader, they have a reader*

Vajpayee's initiative

The PM is taking a personal interest in working out alliances

Those who know Mani Bhari Vajpayee say that he probably took this decision in Goa on the eve of the Assembly polls in June this year — that the BJP should concede some seats at the state Assembly level, in the broader interest of getting regional parties to leave seats for the BJP to contest the Lok Sabha.

However, things have proved to be much more difficult to work out than he imagined. Sitting in the Raj Bhavan that warm afternoon, he saw Pramod Mahajan talking to state BJP leaders on the lawn outside. Finally, Mahajan came back and told him "no", the state unit was not prepared to align with the MGP, because the BJP believed it could improve their tally on their own.

Vajpayee was most upset at the cavilling of the BJP's state unit. He explained that the BJP needed to be more generous. What did one or two seats matter, when the issue was to form the government at the Centre? His clarity, this has cut no ice with state BJP units, who feel every alliance costs their party seats.

Goa: During the Assembly polls, the BJP increased its margin from four to ten seats. But, without an alliance, the numbers were not enough to form a government. The Congress got to nominate a chief minister. And later, the MGP allied with the Congress for the Lok Sabha polls as well. Effectively, this means that the BJP has lost both the Lok Sabha seats in the state, since the MGP candidate Ramakant Khalap is sure to win his constituency (although the MGP fared disastrously in the Assembly elections).

In a game where one vote makes all the difference, there was an important lesson to be learnt from the unfolding of the Goa situation. From the Goa Assembly elections onwards, Vajpayee has been taking a personal interest in the alliances being worked out, both at the Centre and at the state level. And in the era of coalition politics, his philosophy seems to be, better to concede the one seat now, than beg for it later. For, at the end of the day, the alliance cannot come to power without him.

Madras: Recently, whenever the DMK's M. Karunanidhi went to meet the Prime Minister, the MDMK's V. Gopalanaray (Valko) insisted on accompanying him. He told a bewildered Jaswant Singh that he did not trust the DMK. It is Vajpayee's personal equation with M. Karunanidhi and Valko that has brought the two together on a common platform.



Mani Bhari Vajpayee

Currently, the BJP state unit is unhappy with the DMK's decision to allot as many as nine seats to the smaller allies, the Tamilnaga Rajiv Congress (TRC) and the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK). State general secretary I. Ganesan has expressed his unhappiness over the DMK's proposal of giving 11 seats to the MDMK-BJP combine. However, the Centre has despatched Union minister P.R. Kumaramangalam — an L.K. Advani loyalist who has now become a frequent visitor to the PMO — to Madras to work out a compromise.

Himachal Pradesh: Sukh Ram's repeated visits to Race Course Road have finally paid off. The BJP has agreed to support him — not from Mandi but from Shimla, a seat which the party has not won since 1977. And, with a very strong Congress presence in the constituency, there is little chance of a BJP candidate making it this time as well. In a game where one vote makes all the difference, supporting Sukh Ram makes sense.

Bihar: The Samata Party thinks that

**O.P. Chautala**

the BJP owes its success in the state to it. The BJP thinks otherwise. Samata is also demanding seats in other states such as Delhi's Chandni Chowk constituency. In the end, it will be Vajpayee's personal equation with George Fernandes that will bail out the situation.

West Bengal: She may not fight the election on the NDA manifesto, but Mamata Banerjee is one of Vajpayee's staunchest supporters. The two talk on the phone almost every day. Currently, the alliance is facing problems over the Bankura seat, but in all probability the BJP state unit will be persuaded to concede this to the Trinamul Congress.

Karnataka: When state leader Ananth Kumar met the Prime Minister he said that the state unit was not in favour of an alliance with J.H. Patel's Janata Dal. Kumar reminded Vajpayee that it was he who had

**Deve Gowda**

always pointed out the benefits of the Third Force in that it would divide the anti-BJP vote. So, why align with them now?

Kumar was reminded of the fact that even after Patel, the Deve Gowda faction would act as the Third Force. While the Centre is keen to accommodate Lok Shakti at the Assembly level in order to keep the alliance at the Centre, the local BJP unit feels that it has a chance of forming the government in the state and would not like to see R.K. Hegde become chief minister over one of their own. A miffed Hegde then threatened to withdraw from the NDA.

**George Fernandes**

Realising that they will need his vote later, the central BJP is putting pressure on the state unit to work out a compromise.

Maryana: At his swearing-in, Om Prakash Chautala was flanked by two of Atal Behari Vajpayee's men — though whenever the cameras panned on either Pramod Mahajan or George Fernandes, both looked very bored. It was Mahajan who worked out the deal with Chautala and he briefed the PM at each step. Those who know Vajpayee say he was quite relieved with this arrangement of "outside support" by the BJP to the Chautala government, since it would ensure the Indian National Lok Dal's cooperation at the Centre.

raise in their campaign. During a television interview to Star TV, she said that she was not scared of this. "They don't know what stuff I'm made of," she said.

According to the party's media secretary, Tom Vadakkan, the entire issue is a non-starter. "She has already given a fitting reply to this in her Talkatora speech," he pointed out. Congress strategists point out that it is only the urban middle class that is worried about Sonia's foreign origins. And this was never the Congress party's vote-bank in the first place. The rural voter still sees Sonia as the *desh ki bahu*.

However, the BJP is not convinced. Says Arun Jaitley, a key player in the BJP's campaign committee, "Sonia is

the albatross around the Congress's neck. Without her, they cannot get the crowds. With her, they cannot get the country."

The campaign strategy of both camps is best summed up in one line. While the Congress wants this to be a Congress versus BJP campaign, the BJP would like this to be a Vajpayee versus Sonia battle.

Accordingly, the Congress is concentrating its attack on the BJP rather than the Prime Minister himself, hoping that the party responds in kind. "The BJP's support base is weak," says a member of the Congress publicity committee. "But at the same time, there is an impression among the people that the Congress cannot win. So what the Con-

The Congress gameplan

How the party is hoping to win the numbers game

Stability forms an essential plank of the Congress poll manifesto. Congressmen point out the benefits of a one-party rule versus a coalition of 16 to 17 parties. And yet, just last fortnight, the party announced a tie-up with the MGP in Goa, and with two factions of the RPI in Maharashtra. And, of course, there was that bit of haggling over seats with Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu, with the lady conceding only 11 out of the 40 seats to the Congress. (There was a time when the Congress would contest in as many as 28 or 29 in Tamil Nadu, with ADMK being the senior partner in the Assembly elections. But that was another age.)

And while announcing the tie-up with the RPI, state general secretary Madhavrao Scindia, in reply to a question, said that the issue of power-sharing was still open. Then, what happened to the famous Panchmarhi declaration where the Congress had decided to face the polls on its own?

"We didn't say that there would be no pre-poll alliances," says Anil Shastri, party spokesperson. "We said that there would be no national-level alliances, and we are sticking to that. We have only agreed to seat-adjustments or state-level alliances."

Call it what you like, but a hair is a hair, however much split. After its fiasco in April this year, the Congress has realised that if it wants to form the government at the Centre, it has to sully its hands in alliances. Which is why leaders have gone out of their way to woo both Jayalalitha and Laloo Yadav. (No one missed the irony that two of the Congress's 'cleanest' leaders were sent to Madras to work out a deal with someone tainted with corruption scandals.)

Similarly, there were many who would have loved to have been present when Laloo Yadav went calling on Sonia Gandhi. But it takes more than a dinner at 10 Janpath to appease the Yadav. He knows that the Congress needs him and he is not prepared to concede more than 15 seats—and most of these in south Bihar, where the Congress has no base. He is also demanding seats in other states, such as the East Delhi constituency.

But, while the BJP is still new to the game, Congressmen are old hands at playing coalition politics—regardless of what they said at Panchmarhi. And like the BJP, they know its good politics to concede seats in states where it has no presence, such as Bihar and Tamil Nadu, in return for support at the Centre.



Laloo Yadav



Jayalalitha



Arun Jaitley: "Even people who don't like the BJP, like Atal Behari Vajpayee"



Kamal Nath: "The Congress has a history of leadership. The BJP just cannot compete"

gress campaign needs to do is to focus on the fact that the Congress is going to win," he adds.

In order to do this, the Congress is going to talk about its glorious past and compare that with the negative aspects of the BJP led government. "We are going to ask questions like, who brought you freedom? Who brought in liberalisation? Who ushered in the Green Revolution?" pointed out a party strategist. This will be contrasted with the scams, scandals and skirmishes in the ruling party.

The Congress poster series of the 'Kaun kahta tha samay kam tha (Who said they had little time?)" line will focus on the fact that while the BJP says it didn't have enough time to put its policies into motion, it had enough time to fight with its allies, to bring in scant



tainted policies and, of course, to take the bus to Lahore. "The government as a whole has failed," pronounces Tytler, a publicity committee member.

"We will raise issues like national security and stability," says Vadakkan, who orchestrates between the media, the advertising agencies and the politicians. "It is the fundamental duty of a government to protect its boundaries. It has failed to do so and so had no business being in government."

But, points out Jaitley, whenever the country has lost any territory, it is the Congress that has been in power. "We lost one-third of Kashmir and 30,000 square kilometres of north-east, when the Congress was ruling," he says.

The thrust of the BJP campaign will be on Atal Behari Vajpayee. Party strategists talk about his Teflon-coated image and his feel-good factor. "There is a very high comfort level as far as Vajpayee is concerned," says Jaitley. "Even people who don't like the BJP like him."

It is precisely this fact about the Prime Minister that has prompted Jairam Ramesh to make cracks about Vajpayee's alliance with the BJP. "The Congress has a history of leadership," says Kamal Nath. "The BJP just cannot compete."

Both sides will talk about the economy, the Kargil episode and law and order. These are the main issues. What is

While the Congress is going to talk about its glorious past and compare that with the negative aspects of the BJP-led government, the thrust of the BJP campaign will be on Atal Behari Vajpayee

equally important is the packaging.

The Congress made the first move. It changed the montage in the press-briefing room. Instead of dull portraits of Congress leaders, the background now has the Congress colours and the party symbol. Soon after, the BJP completed the construction of its new press-briefing room. In contrast to the earlier cramped quarters, this one is much larger, with state-of-the-art airconditioning and comfortable chairs. The Congress was quick to scoff at this. "We showed taste and good strategy in changing the montage. What did they do? All they have is money at their disposal. So they get ACs and cover their seats with white puff. It's a typical *pundit* approach to life!" said a member of the publicity

committee.

Congress strategists feel that they have already stolen a march over their rivals as far as poll-preparedness is concerned. The contracts have been given to the advertising agencies (Sony, Madison Bombay and Concept); their manifesto will be out by the end of the first week of August while the NDA will release its on 16 August. The Congress also claims to have a 'surprise' that will counterbalance any effect that Vajpayee's 15 August speech might have on the nation. "We are ready with our plans while the BJP is napping or eating *laddoos* or whatever they do in their spare time," said a Congress strategist.

Although *vishram* (rest) is an integral part of the RSS time-table for the day, the BJP is not spending all its time sleeping, as the Congress seems to suggest. The advertising campaign, which is being handled by Pramod Mahajan, Arun Shourie and Arun Jaitley has been more or less finalised. The thrust of the campaign will be to portray the BJP as the patriotic party. Vajpayee will be shown as the country's very own, home-grown leader, while Sonia will be the alien, *videshi* factor. And Anil Shastri's quip of the NDA being the National Disaster Alliance will be countered by the fact that it was not the alliance but the Congress that split during the run-up to the elections.

Issues and counter-issues

KARGIL

Congress: We applaud the army. The intelligence wing of the government also did their job. The failure was on the part of the government in not responding to the warnings. Atal Behari Vajpayee was aware of the infiltration even at the time he took the bus to Lahore. As a result, over 400 soldiers died.

BJP: We applaud the military action. Kargil has created a highly patriotic environment of a victorious nation. But the Congress wants to see defeat even in victory. It is regrettable that 400 *jawans* died, but they died defending our land. What about Sri Lanka when nearly 1,200 Indian soldiers died, defending a foreign land?

Congress: In Sri Lanka, we were doing our duty as a peace-keeping force. This is part of our international commitment to keep peace in the region. You cannot compare this with Kargil which is a question of national security. The government did nothing except go with a begging bowl around the world seeking support. What diplomatic victory? In the end, it was third-party



Manmohan Singh



The Kargil conflict

intervention by Bill Clinton that persuaded the Pakistanis to withdraw.

BJP: The Congress refused to be part of the war effort and now they are refusing to be part of the victory as well. When the army was fighting, we were the cheerleaders, and they were the chest-beaters.

PRIME MINISTER

Congress: When you are talking about the NDA, says Jairam Ramesh, don't forget the biggest alliance of them all — the one that Vajpayee has with the rest of the BJP. He is not even the BJP's unqualified choice as Prime Minister, let alone the country's.

BJP: That is all very well. But what about the Congress? Why are they not coming out with their candidate? Is it Sonia Gandhi or is it Manmohan Singh? The country has a right to know, but the Congress is silent because they know that the minute it takes Sonia's name, it will lose.

Congress: It is our tradition that we



Bus diplomacy

never go to the polls with the prime ministerial candidate. The CPP will decide after the polls.

BJP: When you had a vote-winning leader like Rajiv Gandhi you did not hesitate to project him as your prime ministerial candidate.

ECONOMY

Congress: Who ushered in the green revolution? Who brought in the computer age? Who ushered in liberalisation — though we are pleased that the BJP has conceded to the Congress economics and put its

swadehi politics on the backburner.

BJP: Never has the Sensex been at a record high and the inflation at a record low. And this was despite the South Asian economic crisis, despite the sanctions and despite Kargil. "The guns were booming in Kargil and the Sensex was booming elsewhere," says Arun Jaitley.

BOFORS

Congress: This time, we will raise the issue of the Bofors gun. The government has admitted that it could not do without the gun to drive the infiltrators out of India. The

steel prices. In fact, say Congressmen, the corruption starts from the PMO itself.

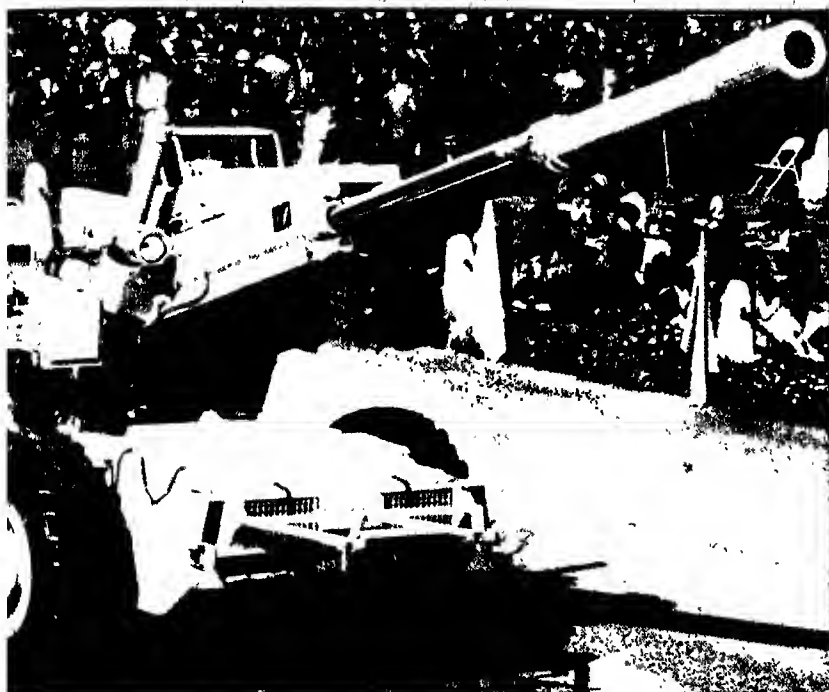
BJP: How can the Congress talk about corruption? Narasimha Rao is facing corruption charges in court; Rajiv Gandhi lost an election on allegations of kickbacks. And how can the Congress raise fingers at this PMO? Has it forgotten the Harshad Mehta episode? The R.K. Dhawan and the A.N. Verma regime?

POKHRAN-II

Congress: Pokhran-II brought Pakistan on par with India

And both sides are wooing the media. Sonia Gandhi has emerged from isolation and is now meeting reporters covering the Congress, albeit on an informal, off-the-record basis. To help her interact with individual members, Sonia's strategists have given their president a brief bio-data of the journalists that she would be meeting. Her recent television appearance is all part of the meet-the-people strategy.

Another suggestion made by the publicity committee is that party leaders should interact more with journalists and give them feedback to their stories — regardless of the fact whether they are positive or negative. After all, points out a committee member, it was the media that highlighted the onion shortage and won the Assembly election for us.



moral of the story, says Jairam Ramesh, with a wicked grin, is "look Bofors you leap"

BJP: It is not the gun, but the kickbacks on the deal that worried us.

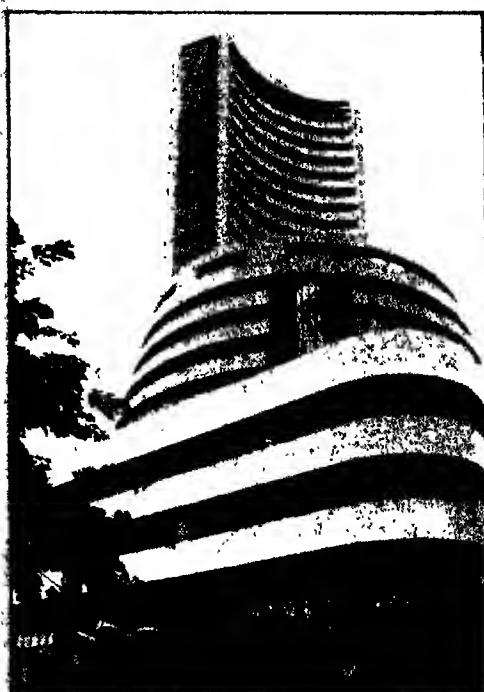
CORRUPTION

Congress: "The telecom scam is the biggest scam this country has ever seen," says Jagdish Tytler. Other scams include the proposed purchase of aircraft and the fixing of

Bofors gun

militarily. The fallout of this was felt in Kargil. After its new-found confidence as a nuclear power, Pakistan dared to cross the LoC.

BJP: Congress governments were toying with the idea of testing Pokhran-II, but they couldn't summon up the courage to do it. The grapes are sour. The tests were essential for India's national security interests. Pakistan doesn't need any provocation to fight with India: what happened in 1965? What about 1971?



BSE

And with barely two months to go before the polls, things are just beginning to turn nasty. Unfortunately, the ones that will get caught in the crossfire are the two leaders: Sonia will have to put up with cracks about her accent by knicker-wallahs speaking impeccable Hindi; and for their part, Congressmen have already begun looking for ways to pun foster son-in-law with faster sons-in-law.

The campaign for the 1999 Lok Sabha polls has begun. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

The Shiv Sena is trying to improve its poll prospects in Maharashtra by cashing in on the disenfranchisement of Bal Thackeray

"Garva se kaho hum Hindu ham... Hindustan Hinduon ka hai... Nahi kisike baap ka..."

This inflammatory speech made 12 years ago while campaigning for Assembly by-polls has cost Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray his right to vote and contest any elections until the year 2001. On 28 July, the Election Commission debarred the Sena Supremo from casting his vote or contesting polls for six years with effect from 1995. His name was struck off the voters' list of Bandra Constituency, where he resides.

Thackeray had made a "communal as well as a jingoistic speech" at a Ville Parle rally while campaigning for a Sena candidate, Ramesh Prabhu, during Assembly by-polls in 1987. However, after the elections, the losing Congress candidate, Prabhakar Kunte, had filed a Writ urging the Bombay High Court to declare Prabhu's election "null and void on the grounds of corrupt practices under Sections 123 (2), (3) and (38) of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951" — it states that a candidate should not be allowed to seek votes in the name of religion. In 1989, the High Court had accepted the petitioner's claim and set aside Prabhu's election, simultaneously stating that Thackeray had violated the provisions of the RPA and debarred him from contesting elections for six years along with Prabhu.

Subsequently, the Sena chief filed a special leave petition in the Supreme Court. However, a three-member Bench headed by the then Chief Justice J.S. Verma finally upheld the High Court's verdict in December 1995. Since then the state government had been dragging its feet on the case and it was only in November 1997 that the secretary of the Maharashtra Assembly referred the matter to President K.R. Narayanan. The President, in turn, referred it to the Election Commission to decide on the nature

Blessing



BAL THACKERAY

and degree of Thackeray's punishment.

"Is this what a democracy is? I pity a democracy that took away my right to vote," was how the Sena chief reacted to this news. *Saamna*, the Sena's mouthpiece, quotes him: "The fun is that I had taken a decision never to contest an election in my entire life. So what is the use of this punishment?" However, a few days after the EC's decision, a high-level dele-

"I had taken a decision never to contest an election in my entire life. So what is the use of this punishment?"

in disguise?

gation of Sena leaders led by former chief minister Manohar Joshi met state chief electoral officer, D.K. Shankaran, urging him to get the order revoked — "as it has hurt the sentiments of the Sena workers and has created unrest."

Meanwhile, counsel for Kunte, the original petitioner, has sent a legal notice to the EC, challenging its decision to count the disqualification period from 11 December, 1995. His contention is that under Section 8(A) of RPA, disqualification takes place from the date of the Order passed by the President, in this case, from July 1999.

With Lok Sabha and Assembly by-polls scheduled for September, the Opposition parties are gladly turning the disenfranchisement of Thackeray into an election issue. Both the Nationalist Congress Party and the Congress believe that this is the beginning of the end of the saffron alliance, especially that of the Sena. Says Chhagan Bhujbal, former Sena leader and state chief of the NCP, "Thackeray's reputation and credibility has been badly tarnished, he has lost the moral right to lead the Shiv Sena. On what credentials will he seek voters for his party? The coalition government's end will be worse than expected." Agrees Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee chief Pratapran Bhosle. "The EC's decision will have an adverse impact on the Sena-BJP in the polls. The saffron alliance, especially the Sena, has ruined whatever slim chances it had of gaining even a respectful number of seats." However, the Sena's state ally — the BJP — has reacted with rather cautious optimism. Speaking to mediapersons, deputy chief minister Gopinath Munde said that, "The decision against Thackeray would be counter-productive and would spread discontent among the people. Instead of harming the alliance in elections, it would immensely benefit it."

Both the Shiv Sena and their detractors are trying to gain political mileage from the development. "The news could not have come at a much better time," a few Sena leaders privately admit. Some have even termed it a "bles-

sing in disguise". Quite a turnaround, considering the Sena's initial reaction of shocked silence. The Sena chief himself believes that the "people will vote with a vengeance against the EC's decision and the Sena-BJP will win with a majority in the forthcoming Assembly by-polls." As a senior Sena leader explains: "With the party's political fortunes at a low, and no significant issue on the Sena's poll agenda, we were quite at a loss. However, the EC's severe decision against Balasaheb has handed us an election-winning issue." He further informs that the party "will mobilise

Shiv Sainiks from the interiors of the state thronged at Thackeray's residence to express their support and solidarity with him.

Some political analysts believe that the EC's intention of preventing politicians from delivering inflammatory speeches at election rallies by acting tough with Thackeray may well be lost in this case. In fact, the EC has unwittingly given the incorrigible Sena leader an issue to fight the polls. Says a political analyst: "Instead of disenfranchising Thackeray, the EC should have debarred him from actively campaigning in the



GOPINATH MUNDE

"The decision against Thackeray would be counter-productive. Instead of harming the alliance in the elections, it would immensely benefit it"

"Thackeray's reputation and credibility has been badly tarnished. He has lost the moral right to lead the Shiv Sena"



CHHAGAN BHUJBAL

public support and appeal to their emotions. We will tell people that this is the punishment for speaking about Hindutva in a country of Hindus." In fact, as the Sena leadership informs, the party's new election slogan will be something on the lines of "If you vote for the Sena-BJP, you will be voting on behalf of Balasaheb." "If hard-core criminals like Haji Mastan, Yusuf Patel, Karim Lala and Tiger Memon, even Bangladeshi infiltrators can vote, why can't Balasaheb?" etc.

The Commission's Order, so the Sena leadership claims, has helped pacify the disgruntled elements in the party. Some of those who were about to leave the party have now decided to stay back and rally behind the Sena chief. A situation quite similar to what happened in the Congress when Sonia Gandhi resigned as the party chief this May, they inform. "They are outraged and are now out to unitedly seek revenge." Hundreds of

elections. What Thackeray has said — "While I cannot cast my vote, I can garner several hundred votes" — holds true. He may once again trumpet the Hindutva card, this time by saying that this is the punishment for espousing Hindutva ideology in a country of Hindus."

However, Nikhil Wagale, editor of *Apla Mahanagar* and a known Sena-baiter, has a different opinion. "The Sena is trying to create an issue out of Thackeray's disenfranchisement, but they won't succeed. The people are no longer gullible and won't be taken in by his tactics." He further adds that the undercurrent against the alliance government for their misgovernance is as strong as it was in 1995 when Sharad Pawar's government was voted out of power.

For the people's mandate, one will have to wait till September. •

Kanjal Walla/Bombay

Murder in the streets

Are police encounters an acceptable way of bringing down the crime rate?

The national capital witnessed three encounters between the police and criminals in a span of ten days last month. One was between the Haryana Police and some gangsters. It resulted in the killing of one gangster and the arrest of seven others. No policeman was injured.

Encounters always leave behind murky tales about police brutality, but none of these stories ever see the light of day. The most dubious of the latest spree of encounters was the one on 23 July outside a five-star hotel. Shriram alias Siriya Pahelwan was killed in police firing

that ensued just after noon that day.

Many unmindful passers-by were taken by surprise — it's not everyday that one hears gunshots in a public place. "It was just like a Hindi movie," one passer-by reacted. One woman entering a mall nearby saw the crowd and thought that a marriage was on.

The story would have been completely different if the victim was anyone other than Siriya. Two years ago, two businessmen were shot dead in a case of 'mistaken identity' at Connaught Place, New Delhi. The commissioner of police was transferred and the policemen

involved are facing a charge of murder.

Yet the present Delhi police commissioner, Ajar Raj Sharma, maintains, "Encounters are situational and coincidental." After a lull of nearly two years, there have been three encounters in a



WHO'S WHO IN THE UNDERWORLD

Shriram alias Siriya Pahelwan was a noted criminal wanted by the UP Police and Delhi Police in different cases.

On 11 July, his men kidnapped a Meerut-based businessman, Swatantra Rastogi. On 13 July, the family received a ransom call for Rs 5 crore. The call was traced to Maharaj Singh at a village called Panchali, near Meerut. Maharaj belonged to the Siriya gang. From then on the UP Police has kept a watch on Siriya.

Delhi Police was tracing Hemu Gujjar, another wanted criminal. He is the right-hand man of Madan Bhaiyya, a former MLA from UP. **D.K. Gupta interrogating Nafeez Anwar: on their trail**





Forensic experts examine the car driven by Siriya: who fired first?

was shot after his car came to a halt or before that. Police claim they hit him while he was trying to escape and after being hit he lost control. In which case our police are as good as our movies make them out to be — accurate shots who get the forehead of a moving target from a distance of more than 15 metres. If Siriya was shot after his car stopped — then why was he killed and not arrested? Police prefer to remain quiet except the commissioner himself (see interview).

As far as the Delhi Police is concerned, a departmental investigation proved that they were right and their version was true. In fact, the police thought the shoot-out was a show of exemplary courage by the team entrusted with the task and they were all given gallantry medals and out-of-turn promotions. No one complained. After all, wasn't society rid of another dangerous criminal?

While these officers and constables were being lauded by one and all, S S Rathee, accused of murder in the Connaught Place shoot-out two years ago, languishes in jail.

He, too, was a decorated policeman. Seven years ago, he was lauded for his participation in an encounter where Satbir Singh Gujjar, another dreaded criminal, was killed. A jail official describes Rathee's situation: "He was one of our finest officers. But today he is mentally

row. That all of them should be coincidental is too much of a coincidence.

In the case of the Siriya shoot-out, the Delhi Police claims Siriya fired four rounds and in defence the police fired two rounds — one hit the windscreen

and the other hit Siriya on his head. Eye witnesses have confirmed Siriya was in a moving car and the police opened fire. He hit an autorickshaw parked in front of the hotel.

The question arises whether Siriya

and a known gangster. Siriya is close to Hemu, and the kidnapping of Rastogi was a joint effort. The amount was to be shared and the final ratio was being discussed at Hotel Ashok on 23 July. Delhi Police was only aware that Madan and Hemu would be meeting to strike some deal in the hotel. It didn't know that Siriya would be there — its target was Hemu.

Tracking down Siriya even the UP Police turned up at Hotel Ashok. But its objective was to continue its watch on Siriya and watch out for some clue that would lead to the place where Rastogi was kept.

However, in the encounter that followed, Siriya was shot dead by the Delhi Police under the impression that he was Hemu Gujjar. This took the UP Police by surprise. Much to the latter's relief, Rastogi was released



Hemu Gujjar: still at large

ed on 30 July.

With Siriya's death and Madan Bhaiyya's arrest, the Hemu Gujjar gang has become weak. This western UP gang specialises in urban kidnapping and operates in the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut axis. According to B.K. Gupta, DIG Meerut, none of the gangs is now strong as their heads have been arrested.

Last year, Nafeez Ansari alias Kalia, who kidnapped a jeweller at Meerut, was killed in an encounter. Mahinder Fauji, another gangster from the area, is serving a sentence in Dehra Dun Jail. "The threat is low but their associates don't give up. They are trying to reorganise these gangs again. One never really kills the problem for ever, moreover Hemu Gujjar is still at large," says Gupta. •

French Diplomat/News Delhi

'WE ARE A CAPABLE LOT'

Delhi police commissioner Ajai Raj Sharma on the encounters

Known in the force as 'Dirty Harry', Ajai Raj Sharma, police commissioner of Delhi, explains the rise in the number of encounters in the capital. In an interview with SUNDAY, he talks about some of the constraints of the police which may justify encounters. Yet, he rejects the contention that encounters are planned operations.

SUNDAY: Within a week of your takeover there have been two encounters. Are you living up to your reputation?

Ajai Raj Sharma: It's not a question of reputation. Encounters are a matter of situation. If a criminal shoots at the police, the police may retaliate in self-defence.

Q: So what happened in the capital on 23 July (shoot-out near Hotel Ashok) when Siriya Pahelwan was killed? Was it purely circumstantial?

A: Absolutely, if Siriya hadn't opened fire on us, then we wouldn't have shot him. You must understand, these criminals fall in the hazardous or desperate category. They can shoot at anyone, they have no fear for the law.

Q: The police claim Siriya fired four rounds, all of which missed but the two rounds fired by the police hit the windscreen and the other hit his head. How do you explain this?

A: It shows our policemen are good marksmen. I don't understand why people underestimate the police force. We are a capable lot.

Q: So according to you, encounters are not planned in advance?

A: No, not under me at least. A policeman has the right to self-defence. Sometimes the police in its over-enthusiasm to perform does take the law in its hands. It's all done in good faith but I disagree. I keep advising my juniors not to overdo their roles. Do exactly what the law asks you to



and leave the rest.

Q: Is it true that frustration creeps within the force when someone they arrest is released on bail?

A: It happens especially if the accused happens to be someone like Madan Bhaiyya with a history of cases. But this is an individual phenomenon: *Saza apne hath mein nahin hain* — an officer must do his duty and that's all.

This phenomenon is more common with officers who take their work far too seriously. Let me tell you even an officer who takes the safe path gets his promotions regularly, in fact more regularly than officers who would have taken all the risk while dispensing their duty.

Q: Do you mean the police don't have much powers to curb crime?

A: Yes, we do all the hard work and the next day you find the criminal going scot-free. Even a criminal's confession to us isn't considered proof in the court. That's why I feel we should do only that much as required by law. Only when inefficiencies arise will political bosses think of devolution of greater powers.

Q: In the Siriya case we were told Delhi Police and UP Police were working with different objectives — and with Siriya shot dead, it became difficult to trace where a kidnapped Meerut-based businessman was held.

A: The criminal was in Delhi, so couldn't they [UP Police] inform us in advance? Instead they kept it a secret — this was poor coordination. We have now decided to hold meetings every month and a meeting at

my level every quarter. This should improve things.

Q: Are encounters an effective deterrent to criminals?

A: Very effective. These chaps [criminals] are scared of them like hell. The crime rate dips immediately, there's no denying that. But that doesn't mean police starts conducting encounters — *ho jaye to alag baat hai*.

Q: Are you convinced that the two



encounters in your time are genuine?

A: All encounters under me, now or in the past, are genuine. I am satisfied with the reports given to me by senior officers in this case. In fact I have given all the seven involved in both the encounters out-of-turn promotions. It motivates the police.

Q: There was a case two years ago when two businessmen were killed in a case of mistaken identity — there were no encounters after that. You seem to have restarted the whole thing.

A: Don't judge us by one case. I am different, I won't tolerate such shortcomings. In my case these two encounters were situational. •

*Interviewed by Praveen Dhal
Samanta/New Delhi*

broken. The senior officers were transferred, while he faces the charge of murder."

It would be naive to believe that all encounters are accidents. The police always explain encounters as an act of self-defence and it is true that usually it is the victim who fires first. But many senior police officials told SUNDAY that a majority of the police encounters are 'fake and pre-planned'.

However, several felt that encounters were the only way to get rid of dreaded criminals. "These criminals have no fear of law. If you book them within 24

The car of a Delhi businessman killed in a shootout: mistaken identity?

hours, they are out on bail. They threaten police witnesses who eventually turn hostile. Encounters are the only way to punish them."

Many cite Punjab as a perfect example where police encounters have brought peace, especially in situations where criminals had penetrated the network of 'Sikh militants' and often it was hard to tell one from another.

Imposing fear of the law, for that's what encounters are premised on, has its own problems. Today, the Punjab Police is fighting approximately 1,500 cases of murder against it in various courts.

But how appropriate would it be to compare Delhi with Punjab of the Eighties? Moreover, encounters do more than just establish peace. They are short cuts to promotions, gallantry

medals and honour. Also the probability that the police may be used as a pawn in inter-gang rivalry can't be ruled out. This practice is common among the mafia in Bombay. Police encounters are shrouded in such suspicions.

Way back in 1976, Sunder, a dreaded criminal, was killed. It was shown as an encounter. He was a threat to the late Sanjay Gandhi and his arrest was urgent. Some of his associates were held but Sunder was still at large. He finally surrendered through a relative in the army in Rajasthan. After which he was transferred to Delhi by a court order. Two days after his arrival Sunder was found shot dead.

The police called it encounter and the matter was hushed up. Subsequently in 1977, the Janata government ordered a CBI inquiry. The inquiry indicted some police officers but lost the case in court. Reportedly, the inquiry is yet to be closed. How did Sunder die after he surrendered? The question is still unanswered.

In 1991, a militant was killed in an encounter at Super Bazaar, Connaught Place. Though police maintain the militant was on the run and opened fire on the police when he was cornered, reliable sources said that the militant was caught by the public. Two constables of Delhi's West district who happened to be there tied his hands and legs. He was handed over to the chasing policemen — yet he was killed in an encounter. How? Sources say he was shot at point-blank range by the officer chasing him. No action. A few days later the officer was promoted and rewarded as well.

In another case, a few years ago, Delhi Police (South) killed Fundy, a criminal, in an encounter at Agra. A month later Fundy was arrested by Delhi Police (North). Then who was killed in Agra? Delhi Police says the man killed in Agra was only an associate of Fundy and on discovering this, the search for Fundy restarted.

If this was the case, then why did the police wait for Fundy's arrest to clarify the Agra encounter? For a month people were given the impression that Fundy was dead while he still roamed at large. The police's efforts to hide details of encounters raise doubts about their authenticity.

Delhi Police remains divided on whether encounters are a deterrent. An official who has participated in many

SHARMA'S LIMITS

Can the means justify the end?

In the late Eighties, when militancy was at its peak in Punjab, a group of rookie officers from the police academy were sent to this violence-torn state to understand how the law enforcement agencies were meeting the challenge of insurgency.

During their visit to the headquarters at Chandigarh, they were informed that an encounter had taken place between the police and Sikh militants at a police station. These eager officers rushed to the site to find out how the intrepid Punjab Police had snuffed out the challenge of the militants.

They were welcomed by a smiling station house officer (SHO) who excitedly shelled out details about his great achievement. He said that the militants had tried to attack the post to loot weapons. He took them to a courtyard where the encounter had taken place.

Surprisingly, only one wall had bullet marks. It was apparent that the bullets had come from one direction, that is, from the police. The policemen had not even a nick or graze of a bullet to show. Four militants had been killed in this 'encounter'.

For the young officers, it was their cynical initiation into what human rights groups dub as 'encounter culture'. At Chandigarh, they were told how the chief minister and senior police officers had congratulated the SHO and his brave men, who were recommended for gallantry awards. It was encounters such as these that helped bring Punjab back to India.

Encounters, in spite of the violent and cruel import, represent a moral dilemma for those who deploy this strategy as well as those who execute it. The strategy to kill militants and criminals without trial stems from the thinking that the criminal justice system is incapable of dealing with such people. It is also premised on the fact that hardened criminals do not have the right to a fair trial.

Justification in killing these people lies in the fact that not only do these offenders draw immunity from

the same legal system that they habitually violate but they also — due to their financial resources — manage to lower the resolve of those who can bring them to book.

"While 90 per cent of the encounters are fake, they have to be resorted to against those people who by their actions either undermine the civil society or the Indian nation state. They are also people who cannot be convicted in a trial," explained a senior police official.

This line of thinking draws inspiration from Chanakya and the German philosopher, Hegel, who gave primacy to the state against the individual. Chanakya, who defined statecraft for a legion of Indian leaders, rationalised killings and repression against the enemies of the state.

But Chanakya also assumed a benevolent dictator driven by altruistic goals, fair and even-handed in dealing with his subjects. Indian political and social leadership — torn asunder by corruption, casteism, communalism and class considerations — is too blinkered, selfish and opportunistic to use Chanakya's radical prescription for preservation and perpetuation of the state.

On the contrary, the ruling class employs the instrument of encounters, in many parts of the country, to

preserve the vested interests. Encounters have also been pervasively used to win presidential commendation and awards. Bihar and UP are prime examples where political and caste interests have been furthered through a policy of selective 'encounters'.

The first time police encounters caught media attention was in 1980. At that time, Vishwanath Prasad Singh had become the chief minister of UP and went about 'correcting' the political and social changes brought about by the brief Janata Party rule.

Singh's reign was epitomised by killings by dacoits and police encounters. Interestingly, the majority of the dacoits on UP Police's hit list were Ahirs. In those days, Mulayam Singh



Mulayam Singh Yadav: accused V.P. Singh of genocide

Yadav had accused Singh of perpetrating genocide against members of his caste.

More recently, when the Bharatiya Janata Party government came to power in the state, it promised to take on the mafia that had acquired deep roots due to the patronage of Congress and Samajwadi Party governments.

Sri Prakash Shukla, a gunslinger and extortionist, symbolised the mafia in UP. Every conceivable crime was put against his name. He was also seen to be a threat to the life of chief minister Kalyan Singh. The government constituted a special task force headed by Ajai Raj Sharma that was mandated to neutralise Shukla.



Kalyan Singh: defanged the STF



V.P. Singh: when he was the UP CM, encounters were the order of the day

The STF found to its horror that Shukla, while in Lucknow, sought refuge in the houses of ministers. When the STF sought permission to raid those houses, Kalyan refused as he could not afford to antagonise anyone in a coalition government.

Finally, destiny caught up with Shukla and he was nabbed in Delhi. According to police sources, he was taken to UP and killed in an 'encounter'. The killing had a deterrent effect on other criminals, who began to maintain a low profile.

With Shukla killed, Kalyan and his ministerial colleagues—with criminal records—found STF and its intrepid boss Ajai Raj Sharma a bit of a nuisance. There was no attempt on the government's part to take action against those people and forces that spawned such criminality or gave it protection. Attempts were made to defang the STF and Sharma. Sickened by the government's attitude, Sharma reportedly opted for a transfer.

In Delhi, too, he has tried to adopt the same rough and ready tactics of encounter against the powerful western UP criminal mafia that has blighted law and order in the capital. But if the attitude of disgruntled Delhi Police officials is anything to go by, it is unlikely to succeed.

The manner in which the alleged western UP mafia don, Madan Bhaiyya, managed to get off easy clearly shows the limits of Sharma's encounter policy. •

Sanjay Kapoor/New Delhi

encounters in the capital said, "Before 1995 there were many encounters. As a result between 1995 and 1997 crime actually came down. So there was also a period when there were no encounters."

Another group of officers say crime statistics can be manipulated. "There are so many complications while registering an FIR that a case for a particular section of the IPC can be registered differently or not registered at all. These are some of the tricks senior officers resort to when there is political pressure to show a reducing crime rate," said an official.

The National Police Commission had

ly finds time for interrogation. "In his euphoria if he uses third degree methods he lands in trouble and if he doesn't, the case becomes weak. After all this when the case reaches the court, confession before the police isn't considered evidence," explained an official.

The ones who suffer the most are the junior officers, specially the non-IPS officers. While encounters mean quick promotions, they also assure the axe if anything goes wrong. Senior officers often wriggle out of it. In the Siriya shooting, the DCP of the area reached the spot an hour after the encounter. Sources said he first confirmed the identification



The most dubious of the latest spree of encounters was the one on 23 July outside a five-star hotel. Shriram alias Siriya Pahelwan was killed in police firing just after noon that day

suggested a way of authenticating encounters. It had recommended a judicial enquiry into encounters, but the police are yet to implement it. Some feel this would translate into distrust of the police and would demoralise them completely. Yet there have hardly been any case where a policeman has been charge-sheeted by the department for a false encounter.

A study in Europe has shown that more than the quantum of punishment it is the certainty of punishment which reduces crime. Encounters can at best be considered as a Robin Hood method to eliminate criminals. This also reflects poorly on the legal system which can't bring to book those criminals whose history itself serves as ample evidence.

A station house officer is so burdened with cases and other duties that he hard-

ly finds time for interrogation. When it comes down to awards these officers don't miss a chance to take credit.

Encounters are necessary but isn't it important to have a more transparent investigation into any such incident? Awards, promotions and iconising today hide some of the dirtiest truths behind encounters.

As one officer recalls submitting a report on one of the encounters to his commissioner which stated that an award must not be given in the case as the encounter was false. "Arrey bhai sanyha karo, political pressure hai, aur phir enquiry to department ki bhalai ke liye hoti hai," replied his superior. The officer got a medal, the report ate dust. •

Pranab Dhal Samanta/New Delhi

Telecom: The M

Is the telecom crisis really of the Vajpayee government's making?

Much before Pramod Mahajan announced a Cabinet decision on 6 June to replace the earlier license fee-based regime with a new revenue-sharing arrangement, there were dark rumours floating around in official circles that the government was preparing a "multi-crore bail-out plan" for cellular operators for a "hefty consideration".

This rumour — the impetus to which came from a politically well-networked corporate house — froze the Atal Behari Vajpayee government in its tracks. Even though the government at different levels had expressed its intentions to usher in "revenue-sharing regime" to rescue a limping telecom sector, it failed to muster courage to execute this bold package. This was particularly so as Vajpayee was only heading a "caretaker government" and he did not want to take any decision at the time of polls that made him vulnerable to the charges of corruption. Kargil changed all that. Pakistani intrusion transformed the paradigms that determined decision-making.

Suddenly, Vajpayee government was no longer a caretaker. Vital decisions pertaining to use of air force to drive out the intruders and lifting the ban on Bofors Howitzer were taken. Initiative was also undertaken to build up support for Indian position amongst Western countries. For the first time, United States of America and other Western powers chose to back India against Pakistan on Kargil. India's diplomatic initiative managed to picture Pakistan as "rogue state". In spite of the ethically correct position that New Delhi had adopted, the Western powers were not driven by altruism.

Former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao too realised the transformed global political environment and chose to give precedence to the US companies against others. Success of the Vajpayee govern-



K.R. NARAYANAN WITH A.B. VAJPAYEE

The net outcome of this aggressive lobbying is that President K.R. Narayanan, Election Commission (EC) and now the courts have all intervened. Election Commission chose to question a deal that had taken place before poll schedule was announced. What remains to be seen is whether the courts choose to intervene in a matter that seems to pertain to government policy

ess Continues

ment too on the foreign policy front is the outcome of similar exertions where the telecom companies like AT&T, US West played a major role in building a climate opinion in favour of India.

This paradigm shift was resented by some of the Indian companies that had left their fortunes through government patronage in the earlier License Permit Raj. Their fear, not entirely unjustified, is that the Western telecom companies would make them irrelevant. The endeavour of this vested interest is not to blow the whistle on corruption but to stop the technology-driven Western telecom companies that are incurring huge losses from settling down. "The effort of some of the crony capitalists here is to drive the Western companies out and gobble up their network," claimed an angry source. But the moot point is: is this in national interest?

The net outcome of this aggressive lobbying is that President K R Narayanan, Election Commission (EC) and now the courts have all intervened. Election Commission chose to question a deal that had taken place before poll schedule was announced. Taking this activism further, EC threw caution to the winds and also chose to pass strictures against the government when the matter was sub judice. What remains to be seen is whether the courts choose to intervene in a matter that seems to per-

tain to government policy.

What is baffling is the attitude of the Opposition parties. To score brownie points in the coming elections, they refuse to see the individuals and forces that are propelling them forward. The Left parties that have been unrelenting in their attack against the government's decision to resort to a "revenue-sharing regime", probably do not realise that they were party to a decision taken by the UF government that gave largesse to Indian telecom majors like Essar and Reliance.

In 1996-97, the UF government allowed telecom companies to treat the license fees as capital expenditure that meant exempting the gross revenue from corporation tax. This relief goes contrary to a global practice where the companies are expected to pay taxes on gross revenue.

Scandalous in its import, this decision was not even discussed at any level in the ragtag government. Revenue officials that demurred to this proposal were shunted out overnight. The total loss of the government was in the vicinity of Rs 1,500 crore.

The detractors of this revenue-sharing regime are not talking about this variant of telecom scandal, as those who have been providing ammunition against the government have been beneficiaries of this largesse. As finance minister, Manmohan Singh had refused to submit to this demand. He's also keen that the telecom deal survives, as it would strike a death blow to the entire reform process. Is it surprising that Manmohan Singh's voice is missing from the many voices that are emanating from the Congress on this issue?

Left parties, that are trying to live down a letter by their leader Somnath Chatterjee to Vajpayee to bail out the ailing telecom sector, have released a set of documents to show the divisions in the government on this issue. Even though the CPI(M) leader Nilotpal Basu didn't identify the recipients of the kickbacks, they underline the "circumstantial evidence" suggested that those vocally supporting the revenue-sharing arrangement had role in it.

The CPI(M) is leaning heavily on the stand taken by former telecom minister

SOMNATH CHATTERJEE



MANMOHAN SINGH



Jagmohan against revenue sharing. The gravamen of the charge was that revenue-sharing was in violation of the existing contractual agreement with private telecom operators.

Basu claims that the so-called migration package was scandalously extended to the metro cellular operators — who had a minuscule amount as license fee commitment and were to start real payment from this year at the rate of Rs 6,023 per subscriber per annum. The loss this year, according to the CPI(M) leader, is alone Rs 300 crore. In the CPI(M)'s view, the crux of the multi-crore scam lay in this. Nilotpal Basu also charged that the government's claim that the revenue for the telecom sector may actually exceed budgetary provisions of Rs 1,700 crore was grossly erroneous. A one-time settlement of all arrears and prospective payments for the entire license period on account of license fees was shown to be this year's receipt. They claimed that Rs 50,000 crore was assigned away by the government by this bail out.

Government and telecom companies hotly denies this. They assert that the telecom sector was so sick that it was not in a position to pay such hefty license fees.

The genesis of the problem lay in the manner in which the telecom tenders were floated when scam-tainted Sukh Ram was the communication minister. At that time the department of telecom grossly over-estimated the demand for cellular telephone. The bidders too fell for it hook, line and sinker and realised to their mortification that Indians were too thrifty to use an expensive communication system when a cheaper variety was a few steps away. In the process the cellular phones were used as pagers and the airtime usage — which would have helped the operators accrue revenue — remained abysmally low. The other factors that went into these optimistic projections were:

- The cellular contracts were based on GSM mobility and basic based on voice telephony. Today GSM is threatened globally by wireless loop limited mobility and voice by Internet telephony. Licenses were not technology proof.

- Licenses were bid for a certain protection in the marketplace involving duopoly in both cellular and basic services. NTP 99 had opened the market to wider



JAGMOHAN

competition that would further bring down the market share and revenue.

- There have been all kinds of delays by DoT in granting clearances. A telecom commission study had found one-year delay in 1997 alone. Operators feel that the government needed to compensate them for this.

The operators have also been alleging arbitrariness against former communication minister Jagmohan. They allege that Jagmohan had been partial towards Srinivas Telecom of Tamil Nadu and Fascel, a consortium of Hinduja, HFCL, Shinawatra.

The problem has been deepened by the growing devaluation of the telecom regulatory authority of India (TRAI). The TRAI has been fighting hard for a redefinition of its powers. A regulatory

Vajpayee has denied any financial malfeasance in the telecom deal. A pragmatist, he would be the last person to rule out the play of bribes in international deals. Unfazed, he has chosen to go ahead...in the hope that in the coming elections, his personal credibility and integrity would help him ride the telecom storm

authority in a liberalised economic environment needs to be "manager of competition" and "adjudicator" but through an ordinance TRAI was reduced to be merely an "arbitrator".

All these factors have raised the hackles of telecom majors like AT&T, US West, British Telecom and Swiscom. They assert that they cannot wait for a new government to take decision about their miserable state. If the government does not implement the revenue-sharing arrangement, they would have no option but to get out of the country. "We have been bleeding," claims a telecom source. In his view, any financial manager would list out the companies that are willing to cut their losses and get out of the country.

Such a view is hotly contested by the CPI(M) that claims that the metros like Delhi and Mumbai are raking in windfall profits from these licenses. Nilotpal Basu claims that operators are selling their equity for a premium. The two cases in point are Bharati Telecom selling 38 per cent of equity to British Telecom and Essar selling stake to Swiscom in their ventures in Delhi.

Similarly, Hutchinson — Max and Birla AT&T deal in Mumbai, Telecom Malaysia-Usha Martin and Modi Telstra in Calcutta. The Left parties also claim that if the earlier contract had been in place, the government would have earned Rs 750 crore from 8 cellular operators in four metros. Basic operators too would have paid a higher amount to the government.

After the migration, Left parties allege that money has been lost. Telecom sources claim that all the big money that Opposition parties are talking off is notional. "If the government seriously thinks that they can earn so much profit, why don't they nationalise the industry and hand over to the DoT?" wondered an industry source.

Vajpayee who apparently has a macro view of this crisis has chosen to dig in his heels on this issue. He has denied any financial malfeasance in the deal. A pragmatist, he would be last person to rule out the play of bribes in international deals. Unfazed, he has chosen to go ahead with this decision that has given him unexpected diplomatic support during the Kargil crisis. He has done this in the hope that in the coming elections, his personal credibility and integrity would help him ride the telecom storm. •

Sanjay Kapoor/New Delhi

Too many cooks...

The glitzy new food shows on TV often lack authenticity



Remember those good old days when Doordarshan used to have simple cookery programmes under such homely titles as *Raso* and *Ranna Ghar*? Where all the

mashis, *behenjis*, *dadimas* and *pishimas* appeared with their recipes? The upwardly-mobile swing began when social climbers, in their best saris, dripping with diamonds, and wearing ornate rings on every finger, offered with a flourish the strangest 'modern' recipes — purely their own inventions with such fancy additions as so-ya sauce and meckroni (sic). Never mind if the Chinese had a goodish touch of Sindhi or the Italian recipes a touch of Punjabi. Never mind if the *mangal sutra* dipped into the *kheer* or the rings disappeared inside the *atta*. At least we all felt superior and said, "Oh that? Well, I can cook much better."

Nowadays, the TV nouvelle cuisine is either the arrogant five-star variety or home-grown with a dash of ignorance. Most of the five-star programmes have reputed chefs from reputed hotels which get wonderful publicity as a result. We have not yet found out who pays whom. It could not possibly be free, could it? And in tow with these five-star wonders with five-star recipes are hep girls and boys — wide-eyed and asking the most stupid questions imaginable, presumably to show off the expertise of the smug cook. "Dhania? Two cups of water? One tablespoon of rum?" they ask, and look duly impressed when the chef says Yes and repeats the ingredients.

For instance, I have no idea what the woman in *A Taste of India* is doing there. She does not know how to talk, stand or dress and looks totally out of place. But a dumb female admirer is now a necessary adjunct of five-star cooks. Some of the banquet-wallahs or sit-down lunch-wallahs with celebrities have been offering the same fancy dishes, but under different fancy names for years in the print media. On TV they



Most five-star cookery programmes have reputed chefs from well-known hotels which get wonderful publicity as a result. We have not yet found out who pays whom

behave as if they have just discovered a regional cuisine which has been around for years anyway. Little 'modern' touches are added to mutilate them and make them unrecognisable. Of course, we do have the professionals, like Karen Anand and Rupa Gulati, but even Rupa has been known to add her own outlandish touches to classic recipes and she certainly made a hash of the Bengali Puja recipes last year.

Which reminds me of a disastrous programme which invites amateurs to cook in micro-wave ovens within a few minutes, and they walk away with goodies like a set of non-stick pans or a micro-wave oven while a male star buzzes around making small talk. There seems to be no effort to gauge the ability of the cooks or the authenticity of their recipes. The Bombay woman who cooked a

Bengali meal made *shukto* without the standard additions of such favourite ingredients as *panch phoron*, a touch of milk, powdered mustard and ginger. What she cooked was, in effect, a dull *charchari*. She capped all this by calling one of her dishes *posto*. Now, every Bengali knows that *posto* is poppy seed, known in Hindi as *khus*. Of course, Bengalis cook vegetables with *posto*, but they call it *aloo-posto* or whatever and not by the name of the *posto* seed alone. But she went on merrily, insisting the dish was called *posto*. As for her recipe for fish *kalia*, the less said the better. Yet thousands of viewers were led to believe that this was authentic Bengali cuisine. Truly, the five-star chefs and the amateur aspirants to fame are not half as much fun as the *pishimas* and the *behenjis*. •

Fatal Impact

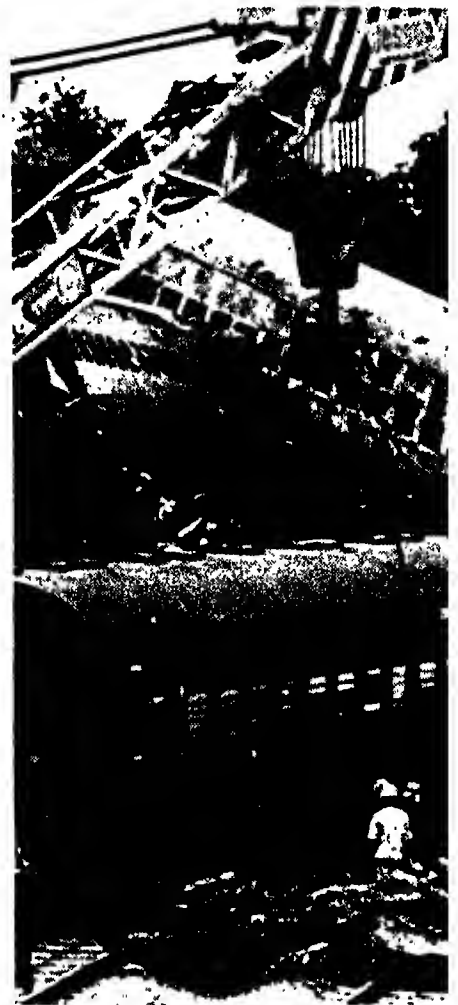
Two trains on the same track collide head-on killing several hundred in one of India's worst railway disasters

At two in the night, lulled by the rhythmic rock-and-sway of a speeding express, death is the last thing on your mind. In fact, it doesn't even cross your mind when you are boarding a train. So, when on the morning of 1 August, army *jawan* Lakshmi Bora boarded the 4055 Down Brahmaputra Mail to join his unit at Gwalior, he couldn't have foreseen that two days later, he would be sitting in the middle of a pile of mangled metal and bleeding flesh in an obscure station called Gaisal, about 75 km from Siliguri, in

North Bengal.

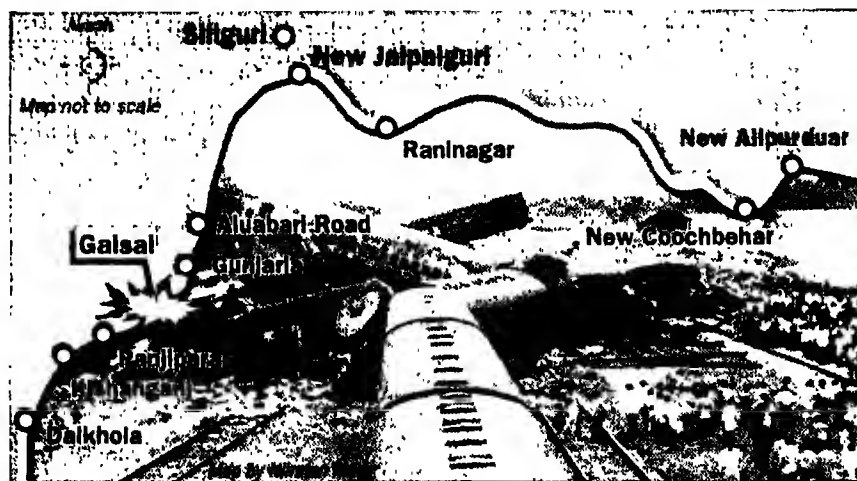
In the wee hours of 2 August, the speeding Brahmaputra Mail crashed head-on into the 5610 Up Awadh-Assam Express. Till 3rd morning, the body-count had officially swelled to 225 with more bodies coming out of the upturned coaches. The figure, say authorities, can cross 500 "Thirteen coaches have been smashed. Multiply that by 72 and you can get an indicative figure," said Prashant Singh, district magistrate of North Dinajpur.

Thirteen multiplied by 72 is 936. Even if the toll doesn't reach that, the



accident is perhaps one of the worst in recent history. And, for Nitish Kumar, it wouldn't have been politically correct to stay on as railway minister. So, on 3 August, owning moral responsibility, he resigned.

Unfortunately resignations, or any similarly penitent responses, don't alter the facts of tragedy. For the simple reason that they cannot bring back the dead to life. So Kumar's resignation can hardly be consolation for Bora and his friends, or for that matter, for the next of kin of the victims, most of whom couldn't even be identified, so badly have they been disfigured in that blazing hell of twisted metal and smashed-out-of-shape steel bogies that had rammed into each other, climbed atop one another, jutting, in a gruesome perpendicular, almost 60 feet in the air.





What may've caused the tragedy

■ The two trains may've been inadvertently put on the same line. The Brahmaputra Mail was on the right track. It was the Awadh-Assam Express which went into the wrong track.

■ The signals may have malfunctioned bringing the trains head-on.

■ Authorities do not rule out sabotage but are tight-lipped about it.

So what happened on that fateful night?

There were no eyewitnesses — the accident occurred in the dead of night. But people who had gathered at the spot later say that there was a loud explosion after which the two trains 'blew up' into a huge ball of fire. In fact, 14 compartments caught fire and four compartments from each train telescoped into each other. "From the wreckage, it appears that the trains were doing around 80-90 kmph," pointed out G.C. Agarwal, ADRM, Northern Railway.

Initially, the police thought it to be a case of bomb blast. Messages received by the state administration in Calcutta confirmed this. But later, railway authorities confirmed that it was an accident where explosives kept in the military coach of the Brahmaputra Mail went off, increasing the devastation.

It's a strange numbness that prevails at the site now. People, both relatives and bystanders, seem too overwhelmed by the goi'ness to think about the actual loss. In one corner of the wreckage, a boy sat alone as if in a trance. He had lost his father. Ram Swaroop Thakur, the assistant driver of the Awadh-Assam Express.

So far, the injured have been taken to Kishanganj Hospital, North Bengal Medical College and Islampur Hospital. By now, it is only mop-up work which remains. Along with civil and military authorities, local people and voluntary social organisations are also chipping in. But as more and more bodies are extricated out of the mess, for hospitals ice is proving difficult to arrange.

The disaster has also meant brisk business for others, mainly locals. Many have started ferrying onlookers in

cars and buses charging exorbitant rates for each trip. Local sources also reveal that immediately after the accident, a few even resorted to indiscriminate looting. A number of rifles and other ammunition, they say, have been looted from the compartments in which the jawans were travelling.

Right now, theories are being propounded to explain why the accident happened at all. The first refers to malfunctioning of signals which could've caused both trains to switch over to the same track. The place where the collision took place is not a single-line section and until and unless the trains were guided to this track, there was no way they could do so. Was this done inadvertently by some careless signalman or was it a case of sabotage? This is something that has to be probed. "It's too early to come to any conclusion," says Agarwal. "We are interrogating the concerned people and a picture will emerge only after we complete questioning them." Some are even not ruling out sabotage, especially after a powerful bomb ripped through New Jalpaiguri Station only weeks back.

The railways have announced an ex-gratia payment of Rs 50,000 along with Rs 4 lakh compensation to the next of kin of those who died. It has also set up the mandatory enquiry commission under the commissioner of railway safety. Meanwhile, more bodies are coming out of the mangled metals. •

Sourabh Sen/Golani

Kargil After K

*The new power play
in Pakistan*

The withdrawal of Pakistani forces from Kargil has led to widespread disorder in the Northern Areas once the scale of casualties, defeat and disgrace of the intrusions became public knowledge. The Kargil invasion was mounted with extraordinary secrecy and care that no one in this region had any inkling that aggression was being planned and that their soldiers from the Northern Light Infantry (NLI) were being employed as the sacrificial goat.

Part of the reason for the unrest was the large number of Taliban in transit being deinducted from Kargil. The Northern Areas is as it is a disaffected region which does not enjoy human rights. The Supreme Court of Pakistan has decreed it is territorially not part of Pakistan but belongs to the undivided state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistan has finally accepted 267 regular soldiers were killed confirming the involvement of the NLI regiment in the fighting at Kargil, though the government is insisting these casualties occurred along the Line of Control. Young officers are angry over the outcome of the operation. Retired officers say Kargil was misconceived. Three of the nine Corps Commanders are pointing an accusing finger at the COAS, CGS and GOC 10 Corps, the brain team of the Kargil fiasco.

Former army chief Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg has claimed that among the Pakistani casualties, 43 officers were killed. Indian military intelligence estimates that 710 Pak regulars were killed. The number of fatalities among junior officers compared to soldiers is extremely high. This trend matches with the disproportionately heavy leader-led casualties among the Indian Army too.

Normally, it is the attacker who suffers nearly three times as many casualties



Home minister L.K. Advani with Indian troops at Kargil

as the defender. This figure rises incrementally in high mountains like Kargil. As many as 269 dead bodies disowned by Pakistan were hurried by Indian soldiers with full military honours. This shame will soon get exposed as will the legend of denials.

After the Kargil debacle, Pakistan has made some changes in its order of battle in this sector. Four battalions of the NLI regiment deployed opposite Kargil and badly mauled in the fighting have been relieved by other units of the same regiment. Nearly 12 additional infantry battalions and some artillery have been brought into Force Command Northern Areas (FCNA) to strengthen the LoC. Interestingly, a battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment has been identified among the new arrivals. The controlling headquarters of 62 Infantry Brigade, which was initially at Skardu and moved

to Olthingthan is now being shifted to Biun opposite Turtuk.

Pakistan 323 Infantry Brigade responsible for Siachen is at Dhansam. These readjustments and rearrangements of existing assets and accretions are intended to bolster the FCNA in the wake of India strengthening Kargil defences by at least another six to nine infantry battalions to the existing five and a division rather than the previous brigade acting as the controlling headquarters.

Pakistan covets all of Siachen, Chorbatla and Turtuk areas it lost to India in 1971 and 1984. Pakistan has not been able to live down the loss of Siachen. It has made furious and frantic attempts to retake some of the positions on the Saltron Ridge, the watershed of the Siachen Glacier. The induction of fresh and non-NLI battalions into the region conveys two possibilities: one, that Pakistan has created a task force for an offensive

Kargil



General Parvez Musharraf



Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif

After Kargil, the government's principal adversary is the Jaamat-e-Islami and its leader, Quazi Husain Ahmad. Nawaz Sharif is still the most powerful leader in Pakistan. There is no threat of an army take-over now or in the near future. But Kargil is a big blow for the army and Nawaz Sharif

opposite the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) in Siachen rather than against the sanctified LoC. The second, and more likely contingency, is the creation of a reserve to checkmate an Indian riposte.

The additional commitment of Indian troops to prevent future breaches of LoC will automatically result in an increased deployment of Pakistani forces along the LoC. Raising the Indian cost of manning the LoC will also hike the price for Pakistan covering the gaps on its side of LoC.

The independent press in Pakistan has described the intrusions as the Kargil fiasco and a military debacle. But the establishment has portrayed Kargil as a victory. Both Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff, General Parvez Musharraf have been visiting the Northern Areas and addressing troops along the LoC. For the army chief tour-

ing these areas has become a regular feature. He has to allay any doubts NLI may have of their 'selective sacrifice for the defence of the Motherland'.

Parvez Musharraf spent two days and a night with troops in forward locations commending them for their superb performance against the enemy. He spent the night at a forward post, setting a new

trend in boosting morale of soldiers. He also announced welfare measures for the next of kin of the *Shuhada* (martyrs). Earlier Nawaz Sharif had twice visited the area and distributed cash grants to the families.

In a belated gesture finally acknowledging the involvement of Pakistan regulars in Kargil, the government has announced several gallantry awards for the NLI. Another honour bestowed on the regiment is its recognition as the sixth mainstream infantry regiment of the Pakistan Army. It already has after each of its provinces, the Punjab, Sindh, Baluch, Frontier Force and Azad Kashmir Infantry regiments. Now the Northern Areas which could not be incorporated into Pakistan has at least been integrated with the Pak regular army.

The NLI was previously not deployed

outside its region. Now it will be. It will also have its own officer cadre. Finding the discrimination against the NLI will not heal the wounds of war. The Kargil scar will stand out as conspicuously as the Kargil Star the NLI will wear on the medal ribbon. The Pakistani guilt is showing.

After Kargil, the government's principal adversary is the Jaamat-e-Islami and its leader, Quazi Husain Ahmad. Nawaz Sharif is still the most powerful leader in Pakistan. There is no threat of an army take-over now or in the near future. But Kargil is a big blow for the army and Nawaz Sharif. The Pakistan Army will carry an additional grouse against the Indian Army Revenge for Bangladesh (1971), revenge for Siachen (1984), revenge for smaller Siachens since 1984 and now revenge for Kargil...

Two other developments are noteworthy — the ISI marginalised by the army during Kargil, is muscling back into the power matrix; and renegade freedom fighters surplus to Kargil are being transferred to Afghanistan. Nawaz Sharif has a good equation with the ISI chief Lt. Gen. Mohammad Ziauddin. Both he and Parvez Musharraf are his appointees. But there is no love lost between them.

The ISI will play a more significant role in the post-Kargil internal dynamics in Pakistan. It has to be remembered that the same government has never been returned to power in Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif may prove the exception.

India's interest is best served with Nawaz Sharif in power, but cut to size. Once the Lahore process is resumed after Pakistan has made symbolic gestures towards preventing cross-border terrorism and giving more credible assurances on the sanctity of LoC, it will be India's turn to be generous and help Nawaz Sharif cooperate and deliver on the Lahore Peace process.

How can India help him? To start with India can reduce the burden of multiple revenges on Pakistan by removing one of them — Siachen. A withdrawal from Siachen will help reduce the LoC and build bridges towards a resolution of the Kashmir problem. India can help economically too. •

(The author was a general officer commanding of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in Southern Sri Lanka. He is the founder member of the Defence Planning Staff of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.)

*Not far from the
madding crowd of
Calcutta*

"Ei bus ta Kolkata jabe (Will this bus go to Kolkata?) "No problem, dada, chhoto Kolkatar kachei namiye debo (...I'll drop you off very near 'small' Kolkata)," replies the 'Mithun-chhap' conductor in central Calcutta. Sounds strange? Well, this is a journey to Kalikata, from Calcutta — or rather, to a village they call 'Kolkata', from the megalopolis we must all, soon, call 'Kolkata'.

The 'house full' bus trundles out of Calcutta, winds its way through the bylanes of Howrah, and then hits the highway to Amta. The concrete jungle fades into flooded fields. An hour-and-a-half into the rattling ride — interrupted by brief stops to squeeze in even more people and their assorted bundles — the bus grinds to a halt at 'Amta college more' (college corner).

Now, it's time for a 4 km rickshaw ride. "Babu, it normally takes 15 minutes to reach Kolkata, but the condition of the road is very bad," declares Sheikh Salim. For the next 45 minutes, he hauls the cycle-rickshaw through mud and slush, through Mandariya, Santoshnagar, Sameshwar and Roshpur. And then, it's Kalikata.

First stop, Agragati. The club, founded in 1978, is the hub of all socio-cultural activity here. Standing atop the 'modern' club house, casting a bird's-eye view over the village in submergence, one learns some relevant facts and figures about the village. Name: Kalikata. Area: 95.55 hectares. Residential Houses: 243. Population: 1,342.

"Though this place is spelt Kalikata, it has always been called Kolkata. And our Kolkata is older than yours. Over the years, as people began travelling more frequently to the city, to avoid confusion, they started referring to this as 'Chhoto Kolkata'," explains Tapan Mondal, secretary of Agragati.

But what is a name without identity? What is a place without people? What is an experience without emotions? A walk down the lone elevated road that cleaves the village into two reveals a poignant picture of life in Kalikata. It is here that one realises why geography tex-

A place cal



Pather Panchali: the lone road that runs through the small village



End of the road: the Nimtala burning ghat

books in school would refer to the Damodar as the 'sorrow of Bengal', for the entire village to the left of the 'high way' has been ravaged by the river. Water has raided every hut, destroyed every crop. The villagers are struggling to stay afloat. They commute by boat or wade through the stagnant water.

"Just look at the way we live. This is what happens during every monsoon, and this time it is particularly bad. But the babus from Kolkata only come when they need our votes before elections. They are never there when we need them. Let them come this time, our women will chase them out with jhentas

led Kolkata



Keep the faith: the Dharma Mandir in Dharmatala, central Kalikata



River of sorrow: the Damodar has flooded half the village

(broomsticks)," bursts out Shankar Das, with a despairing look at a snake that slithers over the waters towards the hut which was his home.

For the people of Kalikata, the relationship with Calcutta is not restricted to poll-time alone. It involves a constant

exchange of goods and services, of labour and livelihood. "This has traditionally been a village that people from the nearby areas come to shop in, as this was where the boats would come from the city. All the shops here depend on Kolkata for their stock. Only now, it comes by bus," says Amitabha Nebu, of the 'boat-

In Kalikata, the name game raging in Calcutta is a distant, droll din. For life in this village is a tale of man's endurance against nature's aggression and institutionalised apathy

men family'. Apart from the shopkeepers and 'agents' who commute regularly from village to city, there are a host of daily-wage earners who head for factories and workshops in Calcutta/Howrah almost every morning. And if illness strikes, there is hardly any point in wasting time at the hopelessly-inadequate primary health centre in Amta, before rushing to the city. "We have been repeatedly appealing for a health centre, a proper road, and a system to tackle the flood waters. But no one seems to care," complains Tapan Mondal, while passing the flooded compound of the primary school.

It takes hardly 15 minutes to stroll from one end of the village road to the other. And if only names were all that mattered, there would be little to distinguish village from city. For Kalikata's answer to Calcutta's office-hub Dharmatala, is a dilapidated Dharma Mandir with a small expanse of emptiness in front of it; if Bowbazaar in Calcutta means the congested marketplace in the city centre, in Kalikata it's the popular morning market that is laid out in front of the Kali Mandir (with an exquisite neem-wood deity), and finally there is Nimtala Ghat, with a huge neem tree sheltering the patch of burnt foliage marking a *smashan* that bears no resemblance to its north Calcutta counterpart.

Dusk descends over the small village. The voltage flickers and dims till darkness settles silently over Kalikata. The haunting 'dhong-dhong' from 'ghori-bari' (the house of the Roys with an old grandfather's clock, upon which the entire village depended for years) on the hour, and the macabre mystery shrouding Gordanga (an island-like patch where angry zamindars would bury errant peasants alive) hang heavy over the village, like the humid monsoon air.

As one rattles back towards Calcutta, the 'rename game' raging in the city seems a distant, droll din. For life in Kalikata is a tale of man's eternal struggle for survival. Tomorrow will find politicians, intellectuals and Bangali babus in the city engaged in endless discussions about the restoration of Bengali pride and glory. While in this village, just a couple of hours away, men and women will resume their test of endurance against nature's aggression and institutionalised apathy, besides renewing their diurnal dealings with 'big brother' Kolkata. •

Sumit Das Gupta and Pradip Sanyal/Kalikata

Sudden death

Calcutta soccer is in a sorry state

Supporters of Mohun Bagan club formed a group of mourners, carrying a "dead" football to the cremation ground. Followers of Tollygunge Agragami organised a football match on the busiest streets of Calcutta. Both clubs were making statements against the administration responsible for almost killing football. Calcutta is rapidly sliding from its pre-eminent position and the average fan is blaming the state government and the parent body, Indian Football Association, for the sorry state of affairs.

Sorry it is indeed. The aura of a Calcutta club's invincibility has long since disappeared. Live television coverage of the best competitions of the world — particularly by ESPN-STAR — has only served to increase the disappointment over local football standards. But the worst cut of all has been the calculated indifference of the administration to whatever remains of the game in Calcutta.

Soccer is the most popular spectator sport in the world. So it is in Calcutta, too. Despite India's standing, vis-a-vis Asia and the world, core following of leading clubs — Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and despite its near penury, Mohammedan Sporting — has not diminished significantly.

About 80,000 spectators turned up at the Yuva Bharati Kirangan — the 1,50,000-capacity showpiece stadium (which, too, is rapidly going to seed) — to see the Mohun Bagan-East Bengal match.

The state government, which has managed to throttle the local film industry to choking point, has now targeted the world's most popular sport. In what seems to be the latest ploy in a calculated endeavour to shake the game to its foun-

dations, the state government is effectively preventing spectators from watching their favourite teams in action. Government apathy led Mohun Bagan fans to mark the "death of football in Calcutta".

As it is, the IFA conducts an unwieldy league. A league is what sustains football health in any country, but not if it features ten teams, the leading two among which could be meeting each other up to three times. This is because the ten-team single round league leads to the 'Super Six' stage in which the top six feature. After this bout, too, if the two leading clubs are within three points of each other, they meet in a play-off final to decide on the champions.

As if overexposure was not enough, the state government's apathy made things even worse.

There are three enclosed grounds on the Maidan, controlled by the 'Big Three' of Calcutta. But the Maidan is owned by the army, while the wooden galleries are under the state public works department. Again, entry to the ground is controlled by the sports department. The clubs are allowed the use of tents and are expected to take care of the playing surface.

While for several years now, there has been a steady deterioration of the playing area because, apart from football, cricket and hockey tournaments were being played there, the condition of the wooden galleries have worsened alarmingly.

Last year, a portion of the galleries on the Mohammedan Sporting ground collapsed, injuring several spectators. While banning all further matches scheduled there, the state government had promised prompt action in repairing the stands. It even went into a detailed exer-

cise to find ways to ensure that accidents did not occur in future.

However, all these pronouncements met their usual fate, they were forgotten almost immediately after they were made. The last season ended, winter inaction followed and yet another season began. Still there was no sign of repairs to the broken stands. Even the galleries on the other two grounds were not repaired.

Apparently, there were inter-departmental frictions which resulted in the galleries not being readied for spectators. The safety angle resulted in matches being played to near-empty stands, only a section of club members being allowed the use of one small stretch. After angry outbursts from officials of the three clubs, a marginal increase in the total number of spectators allowed to watch a match, was effected.





Last year, a portion of the galleries on the Mohammedan Sporting ground collapsed, injuring several spectators. The state government's promise of prompt action was forgotten immediately after it was made

Last year's gallery collapse: no concrete solution

There is ongoing controversy over the construction of galleries. Wooden stands were conventional in the early part of the century. But with escalating costs and environmental considerations, concrete has become the alternative. Of course not with the West Bengal government.

Despite the fact that concrete stands are far more viable, the government is not thinking on those lines. The official line is that army permission is required to make permanent structures. No one in the administration is prepared to approach the army, although a proper plea could make things easy. Mohun Bagan supremo Dhiren Dey had managed to concretise an entire wing of the galleries, securing permission from Delhi.

Tabular structures supporting wooden planks are estimated to cost Rs 4.5 crore. And these would have to be replaced after a few years. Yet no one wants

concrete, for reasons that are not far to seek.

Another issue that is being debated on the Mardan is Tollygunge Agragami's "homelessness". The suburban club is now an all-India force, what with its entry into the National League featuring the best Indian dozen. And this year, they won the season opening tournament, the McDowell Cup, beating both Mohun Bagan and East Bengal.

The club does not have a ground of its own and has to practise at the SAI complex or elsewhere. The players don't even have a tent of their own. And this is one question that has to be addressed by all clubs on the Mardan, especially by the more successful ones. With a professional set-up gradually falling into the space, each club should garner its resources in such a way that it could own its private premises.

It is time the clubs began moving to the suburbs. They could then buy

enough space for a club building, a hostel to accommodate senior as well as junior players, library, gym, a practice pitch and a regular ground. With such a set-up, the club could initiate several schemes to not only recover costs but make tidy profits over the years. Today it is McDowell Mohun Bagan, Kingfisher East Bengal and Manaksia Tollygunge Agragami. There are sponsors for kits and other accessories as well.

The clubs will have to start marketing themselves in right earnest. This is the time to reach out, to initiate development plans for the club and consolidate as much as possible. Getting professional means more than money — it means attitude.

If Manaksia Tollygunge takes the first step, it could herald a new beginning for Bengal and, through it, Indian football. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta

Sachin: the scene-stealer

India's diminutive captain has indisputable cricketing talent. But does he have it in him to be a leader?

The images of a wari Sachin Tendulkar, his cheeks sinking into his palms as he watched wickets tumble on a cloudy day in Barbados, linger. His team needed 120 runs to register a Test match win over the Caribbeans on their soil. Sachin would have had the satisfaction of leading India to a victory abroad. But it wasn't to be — after all the hard work in the first four days, the batsmen squandered it away.

That day, not only did India lose but also Sachin, the captain, and Sachin, the perfectionist, arguably the best batsman in the world. His first stint as captain of the Indian team was an agonising experience. India lost many matches after it had scented victory. What happened? Today, Tendulkar goes to great lengths to rationalise that disastrous year of his captaincy. "It was bad luck," he says, "it just didn't click." And on more sombre occasions, "The team has learnt from its past and that is more important."

The problem Sachin faces is himself. His standards are high, his passion for the game is tremendous, he hates to be second — in all he is a perfectionist. It was fine so long as he applied these exacting standards to his own performance. But during his captaincy, this got imposed on the rest of the team. His Way was the Right Way. It looked as though the Indian team epitomised the persona of Sachin Tendulkar.

One can't forget how Javagal Srinath came charging with the new ball. The fielders rushed into the batsman as though they had an old score to settle, the euphoria was too obvious to ignore. The Sachin doctrine of being

aggressive translated into a robust attitude.

But what Sachin probably had in mind was self-helief. This is Sachin's next problem — his inability to communicate or convince team-mates. Look at the way he kept warning Vinod Kambli about discipline and fitness! To no avail. All his predictions were brushed aside. Kambli had to pay for not listening to the chief.

Why didn't he? Because Sachin couldn't communicate to him the seriousness of his lapses. The Indian team got so used to Sachin hailing them out each time, that whenever there was a crisis everyone began to look to Sachin. He, too, revelled in this — he loves to be the hinge on which the team revolves — he honours it and he delivers too.

However, now as captain whom will Sachin look up to? His role has changed but have his team-mates understood this? This is where Sachin needs to communicate, remove the Sachin-centric syndrome among the players.

The question is, can he do it? Last time around, as captain in high-pressure situations, he went into a shell. We saw an example of this at Singapore when India played against Pakistan. The issue in one of the matches (which was going to be a close call) was who should bowl the last over. Everyone looked to Sachin because he had done it against South Africa earlier — he had no choice but to bowl, he did and India won. Sachin was his own crisis man.

Unlike his predecessor, Sachin doesn't have any problems on the personal front. In fact his family has been a source of strength for him. He is an emotional person but one seldom sees

that affecting his performance. No Indian can forget the century against Kenya after his father's demise. It woke up a sulking Indian team to rise and perform.

The pride he derives playing for India is immense. He is known to cry in the dressing room when the team loses or he fails to perform — an emotion which has earned the respect of other players. Emotions have their own biases — Sachin, too, has his own.

His preferences for Bombay players is a fact that can't be ignored. He was the one who brought Paras Mhambrey into the team. He was instrumental in bringing Ajit Agarkar, Saurav Bahutule and how can one forget the number of times Sachin has spoken for Vinod Kambli.

The Bombay bias has been a long-standing problem of Indian cricket. Someone of the calibre of Saurav Ganguly had to wait for four years before getting the nod — the case of Robin Singh is unfortunate to say the least. Sachin has this prejudice but those close to him say it's not his intention to do injustice. Others feel he is more at home with Bombay players, since he is able to communicate better and get results out of them.

This may be true — he led Bombay in that resounding win against the visiting Australian team in 1998. The Mhambreys and Agarkars delivered in the three-day tie. But does that justify his prejudice?

Then, of course, there is this whole thing about politics within the team. Regional biases have translated into lobbies within the team thanks to Azhar's 'let alone' policy. If Sachin lets his biases get the better of him he might be adding fuel to the fire. He needs to cement the fissures, not widen them.

We have a good guy at the helm — the best we have. But this man has to prove a lot more than just scoring runs and at times winning the match for India with his willow. He has to lead India to victory. Not only has he to perform, he has to make others perform, plan, motivate and in case of defeat, take responsibility.

Till now Sachin was doing what he is good at. As a captain he will have different challenges, some of which he may not like. How he copes is his biggest test. •



NARAL SHARMA

The Pied Pipe

Can WBIDC chairman Somnath Chatterjee bring foreign investors to West Bengal?

Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu is not the only CM of India to embark on massive industrial ventures. West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu is equally ambitious and is persevering to transform West Bengal into a booming industrial economy in the next millennium. And the man chosen to fulfil his dreams is: Somnath Chatterjee, MP and chairman of the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC). The WBIDC has been specifically created to woo investors and promote industry and infrastructure in West Bengal. Recently, when Somnath Chatterjee



Somnath Chatterjee: challenges ahead



PRADIP SARKAR

MILLENNIUM DREAMS

The upcoming projects in West Bengal

I-WIN — a joint venture between WBIDC and India's leading financial institution ICICI Limited — has been set up primarily to promote, develop and finance infrastructure projects in the state. Currently, I-WIN is working on several projects. Following are some of them:

NORTH-SOUTH CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: An integrated, multi-modal transport corridor is being undertaken between the port towns of Calcutta and Haldia in the southern part of the state and the major northern trading town of the state, Siliguri. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has sanctioned US \$ 1 million for undertaking study of the project.

An international consortium of consultants are presently conducting the feasibility study. It is expected to be completed by March 2000. And it is anticipated that work on Calcutta to Haldia Express Highway will begin in early 2000.

30 mgd WATER SUPPLY PROJECT IN HALDIA: On behalf of Haldia Development Authority (HDA), this project is being developed to meet the growing requirement of industrial water in the port city of Haldia.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN OF HALDIA: I-WIN has been asked by the HDA to develop strategy for financing the implementation of the plan. Subsequently, I-WIN prepared the tender document and sent it to the short-listed consultants.

Now, the bids received by the I-WIN are being evaluated.

INFORMATION

SUPER-HIGHWAY FOR WEST BENGAL: West Bengal State Electricity Board (WBSEB) has asked I-WIN to prepare a plan for setting up an optical fibre cable-based information super-highway in the state using the power utilities, transmission and distribution network. The draft report for building up a 2,000-km long statewide



Of Calcutta



Jyoti Basu at HPL: the dream-merchant

received an invitation from the organisers of the North American Bengali Conference to deliver the key note address at San Jose, USA. Jyoti Basu asked him to use the opportunity to interact with NRIs and foreign companies. "Accordingly, we organised a business promotion tour to Japan, USA and United Kingdom. I can tell you that our meetings with foreign companies have been very fruitful," said Somanth Chatterjee.

On his trip to Japan, USA and England, Chatterjee was accompanied by the government and WBIDC officials, and a group of industrialists. During their stay, Indian businessmen and officials held a series of meetings with industrial captains and financial institutions to "woo investors and entrepreneurs" in West Bengal.

In Japan, the delegation met T. Uchida, vice-president OECF, and discussed the ongoing projects of Bakreshwar Power Plant, transmission and distribution network upgradation of WBSEB and urban infrastructure projects like flyovers. Business meetings were also

held with Mitsui, Mitsubishi Corporation, Hitachi, Toyo Engineering Corporation and Sumitomo executives for implementing projects such as Rs 1,600 crore Haldia PTA plant, Rs 440 crore PET Resin plant, Rs 400 crore phenol (from benzene) plant, construction of Monorail system in Calcutta and various other Haldia Petrochemicals Limited (HPL) 'downstream projects'.

In United States, the delegation interacted with information technology (IT) companies. From the meetings, it emerged that Calcutta was poised to take advantage of US \$450 million market in software and services. It was also decided to form a 'Silicon Valley Extension' which would act as a 'new venture incubation project' for the IT investments in Calcutta.

The officials of HPL also presented to International Finance Corporation (IFC) in Washington profiles of 12 infrastructure projects in Haldia and requested the IFC to consider participation in equity. "Our team also had a meeting

network has been submitted to WBSEB in March 99 and is now being considered by the government.

RECLAMATION OF NORTHERN CANAL SYSTEM OF CALCUTTA:

The state transport department has asked I-WIN to conduct a feasibility study on reclamation of 43-km long Northern Canal System for navigational purposes. At I-WIN's invitation, a team of British Waterways came to Calcutta to study the project. They concluded: it is technically feasible to reclaim the canal system. ADB is providing financial assistance for this project.

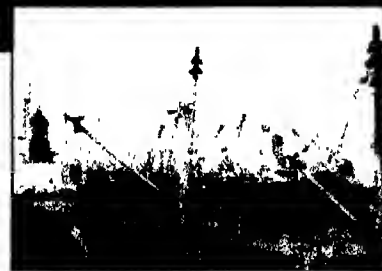
FLORICULTURE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT:

I-WIN is developing Floriculture Infrastructure Complex in north and

south Bengal for the food department of India. So far, I-WIN has received technical support from floriculture experts of UNIDO and had engaged an expert from Israel to provide technical inputs. Some British, Israeli and Dutch companies are showing interest in the project.

VENTURE CAPITAL FUND FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

SECTOR: On the request of the West Bengal Electronic Industries Development Corporation, I-WIN is



setting up a venture capital fund for IT in the state. SIDBI has already shown interest in contributing up to 50 per cent fund.

ELECTRIC TROLLEY-BASED MASS TRANSPORT SYSTEM IN CALCUTTA:

On behalf of the transport department, I-WIN is working on a project for introducing Electric Trolley Bus in the city by using the existing Infrastructure of Calcutta Tramways Corporation. The preliminary financial analysis of the project has been completed. •

"Why single out only West Bengal?"

Asks Somnath Chatterjee



SUNDAY: How was this trip different from the previous ones?

Somnath Chatterjee: Well, for the first time people of West Bengal settled abroad took interest in business. (Laughs) As you know, Bengalis aren't known to be much of an entrepreneur, but this time they looked different. In fact, they organised a business session and showed interest in investing in IT, engineering and electronics sectors in West Bengal.

So did the other NRIs. And of course, our business meetings in USA, Japan and United Kingdom were very fruitful. The foreign investors insisted we maintain contact through internet and video conferencing.

Q: Yet, industrialisation doesn't seem to take off in West Bengal?

A: Please, let me know what is happening elsewhere in India? I don't know why West Bengal is always singled out. Haldia today is almost ready and Bakreshwar power plant has been inaugurated. It is one of the biggest power projects. We are also working on numerous transport, road and infrastructural projects. Several Maharashtra units have also come here to start downstream projects. Many sick units have been revived. Of course, a lot more needs to be done.

Q: Foreign investors are too cautious about

with the World Bank officials to discuss the North-South (Transportation-Infrastructure) Corridor project, which is being developed by the ADB," said Chatterjee.

Finally, in United Kingdom meetings were held with British Plastic Federation, British Waterways, British Department of Trade and Industry, London Chamber of Commerce and NRIs. "The response was very positive in UK in terms of their involvement in plastic processing units, reclamation of North Canal System, etc.," said the WBIDC chairman.

All this sounds very optimistic. But is West Bengal ready for foreign investors? According to McKinsey and Company (which carried out a study for assessing the issues confronting the state in attracting investments), West

Bengal must embark on a 'revolutionary change programme to attract investors'. Though the state has inherent advantages — in terms of large markets, good access to key resources and the increasing favourable business scenario — it has to become unquestionably investor-friendly.

McKinsey warned that before embarking on an ambitious industrial drive, the state will have to improve its social and physical infrastructure, enhance the investor climate, streamline procedures and improve labour relations. The McKinsey team also suggested that West Bengal must try to replicate the success of other countries in the world that have radically transformed themselves like Pittsburgh in USA and Malaysia.

Encouraged, Jyoti Basu and his Cabinet have announced an investor-friendly industrial policy and have also declared

West Bengal...

A: True. Because Delhi never supports us. Whatever is happening here is solely due to our own efforts. The central government doesn't sponsor us, no projection is made of eastern India and not a single delegation is sent here; these need to be highlighted. No one is espousing West Bengal's cause.

Q: Has the McKinsey and Company's report benefitted the state?

A: Definitely, the study has immensely helped us. They have said some good things and have also pointed out defects, which we are trying to correct.

Q: Will it affect the agriculture of the state?

A: No, no. Industrialisation in West Bengal is totally supplementary. This state has a very good purchasing power in the rural areas. And that is being appreciated even by foreign investors. In fact, our rural economy is the bedrock of our industrialisation.

Q: What's it like combining business with politics?

A: (Laughs) No, I'm not in business. I'm in the business of getting people to do business in West Bengal. The CM wants me to carry on, so I'm here.

Q: How's it going back to the people again?

A: Well, this will be my ninth term, if I win. I have served between the fifth and twelfth Parliament. So it's nothing new for me. This time, I didn't want to contest, but the CM insisted. •

new incentive schemes for industries of West Bengal. The sincerity of the state government to attract investors and develop industries in West Bengal also reflected in the key note address of Somnath Chatterjee at San Jose in USA.

"I would like to invite you to come and see for yourselves the winds of change...in West Bengal. Come and share your knowledge, your expertise, provide entrepreneurship and...please share our optimism and our hopes with others in this country," pleaded Chatterjee at San Jose.

Possibly, one couldn't have been more humble in his approach to attract investors in West Bengal. But the million dollar question is: are the foreign investors ready to part with their greenbacks, yens and pounds? •

Arindam Sarkar/Calcutta

Flexible Marxist

Somnath Chatterjee is a man for all seasons

Only recently, CPI(M) politburo member Sitaram Yechury was caught on the wrong foot. He was, he said, revealing the "scam of the millennium" involving the caretaker BJP-led central government in the glitches in the telecom policy. Yechury's main argument was that it was wrong to bail out telecom companies because they were making a lot of money by selling their equity.

The very next day, the BJP released to the public, a letter to the PM written by a senior CPI(M) leader in his capacity as chairman of the standing committee on communications. The letter said "cellular operators have categorically denied that they received any premium by the sale of shares at a discount as has been alleged in *certain interested quarters*".

The letter went on to add: "If it is ascertained by the government on a proper review that the existing cellular operators cannot survive without introduction of a revenue sharing arrangement then obviously proper consideration has to be given upon an objective assessment of all the issues with an open mind."

It is not hard to guess the identity of this senior leader of the CPI(M) who often floats some opinion or other which the party does not endorse. And when the party seeks clarifications or an explanation, he always says it was a mistake. Whether it is the drafting of the Religion Bill for the government of Narasimha Rao or an issue regarding telecom.

In his personal/social circles (quite different from the mob at the Bhai Vir Singh Marg) of bureaucrats, lawyers and businessmen, he is happy to loudly criticise his party bosses. But so far, only once has he shown the courage to challenge the party: when the Vajpayee government lost the vote-of-confidence, he was the one who took the initiative to assemble all the MPs and wrote a letter to the party requesting them to allow Jyoti Basu to become the alternative PM. Informally, the party accepted his suggestion but later he was censured for his role, including going to the press with the 'decision' that Basu would be the next PM; the denial came quickly. The party had never 'officially' taken this line.



He represents the "London School" in the party, becoming the natural follower of men like Bhupesh Gupta, Indrajit Gupta and Jyoti Basu. He is at home in English, with the English because his ideological limits are so very elastic

When news of his censure by the party became public, he announced that he would not fight the Lok Sabha elections. But everyone knew that no great persuasion would be required to make him change his mind. If it had been someone as feisty as Saituddin Choudhary, they would have gone down fighting rather than change their mind. If it had been a pragmatist like Jyoti Basu he would have used his political sense. But even without 'outstanding' qualities, he is the parliamentary leader of the party and now even a member of the Central Committee, a position which has come to him after a long and humiliating wait because for a long time, he was leader of the party in the House but not a member of the central committee.

But then responsibility without power has never been a headache for him. The party has taken care of him. He was given a safe seat after he lost to Mamata Banerjee and he was grateful to the party for that. At one stage, Jyoti Basu even thought that he may be the right one to inherit. But without power

or influence in the party, he has now been overtaken by Buddhadeb Bhattacharya. He was made the chairman of the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC). But because his tall claims about bringing foreign investment to West Bengal did not materialise, whenever he signed a new MoU, people only laughed.

Yet, he is an important person in the party. The reason? One fact yields a clue. In the last party congress, he was the only delegate whose monthly income was more than Rs 50,000. He is the son of Nirmal Chandra Chatterjee, a founder member of the Hindu Mahasabha who shifted to the Left later in life. He represents the "London School" in the party, becoming the natural follower of men like Bhupesh Gupta, Indrajit Gupta and Jyoti Basu. He is at home in English, with the English because his ideological limits are so very elastic. He is neither a communist, nor can he desert the party. He represents a living contradiction. His name is Somnath Chatterjee. •

Rajni Srinivasan/New Delhi

UH, SORRY MR GANDHI

Was a time when after you had wronged somebody you went right up and apologised. Or you didn't. It's changed now. Apparently, the permissible time span to decide whether you are at all going to say sorry or not has gone up: the latest upper limit set is 105 years, doesn't matter if the guy you hurt is dead and gone. Last month, in a rather stale twist to post-apartheid diplomacy, South Africa's KwaZulu Natal Law Society apologised *posthumously* to



Mahatma Gandhi for having opposed his application, in 1894, to practise as a lawyer because he was *non-white*. Gandhiji, then fresh out of a London law school, had been taken to SA by an Indian businessman to fight a case. "The society apologises unconditionally...to the late Mahatma Gandhi for having attempted to restrict his rights to practise as an advocate in Natal," said David Randall, now president of the society. At that time, Randall clarified, only those of "European extraction" could be admitted as advocates of the Supreme Court. Perhaps a much saner response comes from a former anti-apartheid activist, KwaZulu Natal state attorney Krish Govender. "If Gandhiji was alive today he would be looking towards the new millennium instead of seeking apology for sins of the past."

Gandhiji in South Africa in 1904



Maharajah Jungle Trek

INDIA AND WALT DISNEY WORLD

Decor counts. Especially when the set-up is Walt Disney World Resort and you're planning a further take-off on Rudyard Kipling. In its millennium celebrations, Disney World managers have suddenly discovered that since 1971, some 600 million Indian tourists have been Disney visitors. In fact, India now figures among the top 20 of their international markets. So now, instead of just animated versions of Kipling's characters, it's going to be a virtual slice of India this time: the rapids of River Kali on the Indo-Nepal border are being recreated for folks who get a kick out of white-water rafting or the Maharajah Jungle Trek, a journey on foot through dense jungles inhabited by wild and exotic animals. How much India interests them is clear from the fact that Disney imagineers spent months travelling in the country to get a first-hand feel of its changing face. The result is an exhibit, dedicated to India's women and health management project, which has been designed as part of the Millennium Village, another of the new destinations in the dreamscape. And the first-ever crew of ten cast members from India will be actually working on different projects of the roughly 15-month-long celebrations which start on 1 October at Florida.

CUT, CUT, CUT

High prudery and low sensibility come together, this time in a not-so-intelligent application of moral parameters. In what is obviously a case of much ado about nothing, Censor Board officials, upholders of the nation's moral rectitude, say that **Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth*** — slotted for a 3 August screening at Siri Fort auditorium, Delhi — needs three cuts before the film can be even granted an 'Adult' certificate. Kapur hit back deciding not to go ahead with the screening unless the censors back off. "The cuts interfere with the understanding of the narrative which in any case is very complex," he said. "I would rather the people of India saw the film the way I intended the audience all over the world to see it." The first cut demanded are two words used by the Duke of Anjou to address Elizabeth — 'Your quunny' which in archaic slang refers to the female anatomy. The next relates to a love scene which shows a fleeting glimpse of a naked man moving over a woman on a bed and visuals of a woman's bare



breasts. The final cut is the scene where the severed head of Lord Arundel is shown on a stake. Probable next on the board's agenda: Walt Disney's animated Tarzan when it comes to India — he wears a loincloth.

CELEBRITY SCAN: THEY'RE ALSO IN THE NEWS, FOLKS

Story of a Quarrel — and Patch-up

Dramatis Personae:

Santokben Jadeja, below, mafia queen of Kathiawad (Gujarat) and Vinay Shukla, director of the film *Godmother* which stars Shabana Azmi and Narmad Pandey.

The Conflict: The film had been banned from commercial release after Jadeja filed a petition in Rajkot High Court. "I want the film to be banned. It is based on my life and



portrays a bad picture of the Mehar community," she said threatening to drag Shukla into a case where he would never get out of the mess and his film never see the light of day.

Denouement: An out of court settlement. Apparently the director agreed to two cuts and in return she withdrew her objections to some other portions of the film.

Real Winner: Law of the land. It got a mafia don, with 525 criminal cases registered against her gang, to move court for justice.

He wants to be Cultural Ambassador

■ "I want to spread the culture of Punjab beyond its boundaries," says **Harbhajan Mann**. "So my songs are made in a way [that] it appeals to one and all, even to those who don't understand the language." The Canada-based Punjabi singer's album *Oye Hoye*,



which cracked the market this year selling four lakh copies and breaking earlier records set by Daler Mehndi, got his break two years ago when the late Gulshan Kumar decided to promote him. The songs, by lyricist Babu Singh, were an instant hit. Harbhajan, who has been attracting huge crowds on his foreign tours, has also got other music offers and sponsors. Asked whether it means his date with the company which promoted him will end, he smiled but said nothing. It was a senior company official who piped in: "We have the wherewithal to promote him anywhere in the world."

She's the latest Adventuress

■ Choreographer turns film maker **Farah Khan** who choreographed for the film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* except the lead song which was by Santosh Sivan, is going to direct a film. She's writing the script herself and, according to a reporter, is already half way through.



It Shah Rukh Khan plays the lead and, of course, there's a character specially created for her comedian brother Sajid. The rest is nebulous still, barring one post — that of choreographer. Obviously.



SRIDEVI BONEY KAPOOR

Rumours of Sridevi's comeback continue to float in the film industry. Everyone is apparently going on about the fact that she has lost a remarkable amount of weight and is looking better than ever.

Finally, Juhi Chawla is ready to admit that she is, in fact, Mrs Jai Mehta.

Even though the couple married more than a year ago, Chawla refused to

Also, husband Boney has finally had a hit with *Sirf Tum*, and is therefore in a more confident frame of mind.

So what better time could there be to re-launch his wife in a home production?

Pray, what was the point of Dino Morea renaming himself Siddhant when he signed up his first Hindi film? The logic behind the move clearly was to choose a name that the audiences would be familiar with, rather than the foxing-sounding Dino (for the benefit of the uninitiated, Morea is half Italian).



DINO MOREA

But that hasn't worked. He may be Siddhant officially but everyone continues to

call him Dino, whether it is fans, the magazines or even the trade.

But then, as the great poet once said, what's in a name?

If the Ruby Bhatia saga has proved anything, it is that it's impossible to keep a good Punjabi down.

Her career on Channel V ended in somewhat acrimonious circumstances, but Ruby soon resurfaced as the hostess of such shows as *Ooh La La* on STAR Plus. And now that her stint on these music programmes is over, she is back in a new avatar.

These days, Ruby is doing duty on the *Kinetic Mega Show*, on which she interviews such stars as Manisha Koirala, Sonali Bendre, Susmitha Sen and Saif Ali Khan.

Bhatia is as effervescent as ever, chivving the audience along as she gets the stars to open up to her. But is it too soon to hope that she has — at last — found her true metier? •

acknowledge her wedded status in public or to the media. Pressed on the issue, she would react with a coy 'no comment' which was, in fact, all the confirmation anybody needed.

Juhi's fear, apparently, was that her career would be adversely affected by the news of her marriage and

that producers would fight shy of signing her on. But now that Kajol has proved that a heroine's marital status is not as important as her box-office draw, Chawla has decided to come out with the truth.

The only problem is that by now nobody is interested.

JUHI CHAWLA





THE ANGRY CHIEF: S.C. Jamir

NAGALAND

The money game

S.C. Jamir hits back after a CAG report indicts his government for a lottery scam

The numbers game in Nagaland is really hotting up. But this time, it's not political permutation that has taken centre-stage. It's the lottery scam which is threatening to blow up into the biggest financial scandal in recent times. According to the latest report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) on Nagaland State Lottery, a sum of Rs 5,000 crore has been swindled by a politician-bureaucrat-lottery agent nexus.

In its report tabled in the Nagaland Assembly during the just-concluded Budget session, the CAG alleged that only 0.105 per cent of the total turnover of Rs 38,297.32 crore, generated from the state lottery between October 1993 and November 1997, was received by the government. The CAG report also accused the state government of arbitrarily reducing the guaranteed return amount, leading to the loss of revenue to the tune of Rs 9.74 crore between November 1995 and November 1997.

With parliamentary elections round the corner, the report has, obviously, come at a most inopportune moment for the S.C. Jamir-led Congress government. But, surprisingly, the Opposition is yet to make an issue out of it.

And chief minister Jamir has been his usual unflappable self. He has, in fact, hit back by accusing the CAG of conniving with the Opposition to leak to the press the contents of the report before it was tabled in the House. He has even urged the Speaker, Zoveho Lohe, to conduct an enquiry against the officers who have breached the privilege of the House.

"Not only is the systematic leakage of the report of CAG a deliberate attempt to malign the goodwill of the government and the august institution, but the very contents of the report suggest that it is a systematic ploy to malign the reputation and goodwill of my movement," alleges Jamir.

The chief minister insists that the figures are highly "exaggerated". "Such was the competence of the officers of the CAG and the zeal to fabricate a scam that in calculating this figure of Rs 26,000 crore (approx.), it ignored the calculation of prize money which is about 91 per cent," he points out. This refers to the Guwahati High Court judgement dated 16 January, 1998, in the state of Nagaland vs Union of India case pegging the prize money from single-digit lotteries of Nagaland at 90.91 per cent.

Jamir also argues that while "concocting" the figures, the

CAG has taken into consideration the sale of all tickets that are printed. In reality, claims the chief minister, only 20 to 30 per cent of the tickets printed are actually sold. "If profit-sharing was calculated on tickets sold and the effort made by the office of CAG was to ascertain facts and truth, the sensational figures could have been avoided," adds Jamir.

On the issue of reducing guarantee money from Rs 6,000 per draw to Rs 4,000 per draw, the Nagaland CM says that it was done keeping in mind the simple calculation that if the liability had to be thrust on the agent, then the guarantee amount had to be reduced. Rejecting the CAG charge that a sum of Rs 54.75 crore of taxable prize money had not been paid to the Director State Lottery (DSL) by the Sole Distributor (SD), Jamir explains that the DSL had sold tickets and entered into an agreement that the unclaimed prize money would amount to that on the tickets already sold by the SD, and not involve those remaining unsold with the SD. According to the CM, even the Supreme Court, in the H. Anraj case, has ruled that the lottery agent is not a prize-winner and the prizes on unsold tickets held by him do not figure in the calculations.

Meanwhile, ignoring the controversial CAG report, the government has restarted the state lottery from Kohima. It had earlier suspended the lottery business for some time following a Supreme Court directive, resulting in a monthly revenue loss to the tune of Rs 1-1.5 crore. Now, the state government is carrying out 13 draws daily and raking in Rs 10-15 lakh per day.

And as if to prove a point, M/s M.S. Associates has been retained as SD for the state lottery. The CAG report has been particularly critical of the state government-M.S. Associates nexus while studying the lottery business in Nagaland. Other smaller states like Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram have also resumed the lottery business, which has always been a major source of revenue for these north-eastern states. Earlier, while imposing the ban on the state lotteries, the Centre had promised to compensate the smaller states by providing financial assistance to cover up the revenue losses. But the states are yet to receive any compensation.

With S.C. Jamir launching a strong counter-attack against the CAG report, a thorough investigation into the lottery scam is required to set things right. •

Pradeep Pareek/Kohima

WEST BENGAL

Alliance time

Subash Ghising demands a review of the DGHC Accord

Come elections and GNLF supremo Subash Ghising is back in the limelight. All the major political parties have set their eyes on the Darjeeling Lok Sabha seat. This is not surprising. Since 1986, when the GNLF launched its Gorkhaland movement, Ghising has continued to remain the deciding factor.

Parties are already lining up to meet Ghising. Aspirants from the Congress have met him, hoping that the GNLF supremo will tilt towards their party. But Ghising is no fool. He knows that in the coming elections, the Congress is unlikely



DRIVING A BARGAIN: *Subash Ghising*

to notch up anything significant in Parliament. Moreover, Ghising cannot forget the raw deal he was meted out in the early Nineties when Narasimha Rao was at the helm of the Congress. With these memories, it is unlikely that the GNLF will lend its weight to the Congress.

Enter Trinamul Congress. Fiery Mamata Banerjee cannot strike up an alliance with the hill chieftain because of his strident anti-Bengali stand. That leaves only the CPI(M) as Ghi-

Party time

A group of legislators from Uttar Pradesh decide to go on a foreign trip to learn about democracy

They may refuse to see eye to eye; they may continue to gun for each other; they may be ideologically poles apart; and they may call each other names. But when it comes to reaping benefits, politicians of Uttar Pradesh are more than willing to sink their differences and grab the best of both worlds.

Be it *sangh parivar*'s much-touted "principled approach", the Samajwadi Party's "tough talk", the Bahujan Samaj Party's dogmatism or the self-proclaimed "idealism" of the Congress, everything takes the back seat when it comes to the question of going for cooler climes.

A delegation of 17 ministers and legislators was scheduled to go on a 16-day tour of USA, Canada, UK and Holland sometime in June to "study how the Western democracies function". But the trip was cancelled on account of the Kargil trouble. Thanks to their sudden surge of patriotic feelings, the politicians chose to call off the tour. But their "patriotism" stood exposed when within days of the declared "ceasefire", they got back to lobbying to revive the tour.

As the delegation included Assembly Speaker Keshri Nath Tripathi as well as the chairman of the Vidhan Pari-

sing's possible allies.

All these years, the CPI(M) and the GNLFF has shared a love-hate relationship. In fact, CPI(M) leader and state minister for municipal affairs Ashok Bhattacharjee has already met Ghising in Darjeeling. The second round of talks have been held in Calcutta where the GNLFF supremo had a long meeting with chief minister Jyoti Basu.

Ghising seems undecided as to whether he will lend support to the CPI(M) or field his own candidate. It is too early to say which way he will go. There are signs of hard bargaining which is going on. During his Calcutta visit, Ghising insisted on a review of the DGHC Accord of 1988, which, according to him, had many loopholes. What is surprising is that it took more than a decade to identify the loopholes, and that too, before the Lok Sabha elections. But the problem is that the state government cannot satisfy Ghising alone. The central government is also a party to the DGHC Accord.

Apart from a review of the DGHC accord, another bargaining point which Ghising is likely to use is the question of bringing in more departments under the purview of the Hill Council, thus gain access to a larger share of power and funds.

Jyoti Basu cannot afford to lose the Darjeeling parliamentary seat. So the CM has announced the formation of a review committee headed by Ashok Bhattacharjee. This high-powered committee will look into the possibility of amendments suggested by Ghising. On his part, Basu wanted Ghising's support to the CPI(M) candidate as a quid pro quo.

These developments have not been taken kindly by the Congress. According to Prasanta Nandi, a prominent Congress

leader from Siliguri, the announcement of the formation of the review committee just before the election was a violation of the code of conduct. "The CPI(M) is trying to buy votes from the GNLFF, by promising to transfer more departments to the DGHC," Nandi alleged.

Meanwhile, Subash Ghising as a leader is in dilemma. There is a strong demand inside his own party to field its own candidate from Darjeeling. According to political observers, Ghising will never bow to the idea of sending a lone GNLFF representative to Parliament because he will never allow the formation of any other power centre barring himself.

Ghising has so far played the role of a kingmaker, rather than win the seat for his own party. Only in 1989 did the GNLFF sent Inderjit Khullar — then friend, philosopher and guide of Ghising — to the Parliament as a GNLFF candidate.

Two years later, in 1991, Khullar became a Congress candidate, supported by the GNLFF, and he won again, defeating the CPI(M). In the course of the next five years, Ghising's honeymoon with the Congress came to an end.

During 1996 Lok Sabha elections, Ghising gave a boycott call which went in favour of the CPI(M) candidate R.B. Rai. By the time the 1998 elections came, political equations in the hills had changed completely. The Darjeeling district committee of the CPI(M) had split and the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist (CPRM) was formed under R.B. Rai, Dawa Lama and others.

But options are wide open this time. Many of the strategies have been exhausted. The backroom boys are now busy thinking up new ones and driving new bargains. •

Iva Guha/Siliguri

shad, Nityanand Swami, the reopening of the closed chapter was done at an amazing speed. The state finance department was more than prompt in sanctioning a whopping Rs 20 lakh for the trip. Everything was cleared within 48 hours. Though there was no provision for taking along spouses, at least three of the legislators were known to be taking their wives with them. No one knows who is footing their bills.

Interestingly, the entourage includes six ministers of the Kalyan Singh Cabinet, besides two legislators belonging to the BJP, two each of the BSP and the Samajwadi Party and one each from the Congress and the Lok Dal. The selec-

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: Kesri Nath Tripathi



tion has obviously been made on extraneous considerations and what seems to have really clinched the deal in favour of many was their rapport with the chief minister and the Speaker.

These lawmakers' scant regard for the state's near-empty coffers was no secret. But no one thought they would even ignore the report submitted by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG). Barely a few days before the hasty sanction for the trip, the CAG had castigated the UP government for indulging in the extravagance of allowing foreign jaunts to ministers and IAS officers. The report pointed out that rules were violated in 62 of the 68 cases of foreign travel in 1997.

Moreover, what seems to have irked the man on the street in Lucknow was the fact that while citizens from different walks of life were busy collecting donation for Kargil martyrs (a sizeable number of victims came from UP), the *netas* were moving heaven and earth to ensure their foreign trip.

"The way this whole exercise has been carried out goes to show as if a fund-starved government was waiting for people to donate generously in the name of Kargil so that our *netas* could fulfil their long-cherished dream of going to phoren land," pointed out D.N. Mithal who had been a Vidhan Sabha secretary for 17 years.

"So what," said a legislator who found a place on board. "After all, we are making it a point to be back here a day before 15 August, the Independence day." Indeed, having learnt the finer points of democracy, they are keen to establish their patriotic credentials once again. •

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow

Talking back

Tim Sebastian looked a little out of touch while interviewing Indian leaders

When you see Tim Sebastian grilling people you don't know, or have just about heard of, you sit back and enjoy it. *Hard Talk* on BBC, with Hard Man Tim, has been one of the channel's consistently watchable programmes: it's only when it came home in the last couple of weeks that you discovered that it could be less than good.

Take, for example, Sebastian's go at external affairs minister Jaswant Singh. The host had armed himself with facts and figures about India's 'dismal human rights record' and occasionally waved the sheaves in Singh's face. The interviewee, who's been talking in tandem with defence minister George Fernandes in the last couple of months, took the hectoring in his smooth stride. He was his usual urbane self, refuting Sebastian's charges without sounding defensive.

Then you realised that the BBC man had fixed notions about the issues — the nuclear programme, the Kargil conflict — he raised through the conversation, that he'd made



URBANE: Jaswant Singh



UNFLAPPABLE: Fernandes

up his mind before it started and didn't quite know what to do when he didn't get satisfactory answers.

George Fernandes may not be as smilingly unflappable as his colleague but he was equally unmoved on the same subjects. If the Western nations, who'd made the maximum noise about India's nuclear programme, demolished their stockpiles, he'd be happy to listen to them, he said. Otherwise they could just stay out of it: he didn't say that but the implication came through loud and clear.

And as for his round with thespian Dilip Kumar, he, Sebastian, didn't know enough about the movies, the actor, even the current crisis. Maybe he should stick to politicians. •

ANDHRA PRADESH

Report card

Chandrababu Naidu commissions a study to find out how his legislators have performed

They believed getting good grades was a nightmare left behind in schools and colleges. They were wrong. In the run-up to the coming polls, chief minister Chandrababu Naidu has commissioned a study — not by any regular market research organisation — but by sociologists from two universities in Andhra Pradesh, to determine the winning chances of his sitting MLAs.

The results have been categorised into three grades — A, B and C — based on the TDP legislators' image among their voters, their contribution to the development of their constituencies and their performance in the Assembly. The results have not been very encouraging.

Of the 210 odd MLAs, 90 managed an "A" grade, which means they are sure to be renominated; 50 managed "B", indicating that they could do better with a little extra effort and perhaps a change in their style of functioning. A whopping 70 MLAs, including at least six Cabinet ministers, failed miserably with "C". "With electoral conduct norms in force, these legislators won't be able to do much for the voters now and their chances of a renomination are very very thin," says a senior TDP leader.

In addition, Naidu announced that while he may consider the nomination of those who lost the last election in 1998, MLAs and MPs who lost both in 1996 and 1998 may consider themselves out of reckoning.

At the same time, the CM has launched a programme called Praja Deeyana (Peoples Blessings) to lure what he calls "political neutrals" — that 40 per cent of the electorate who don't come to vote. In rural areas, the programme involves women activists of the party going from house to house, applying *kum kum* on housewives and handing out pamphlets.

But the call to political neutrals is really directed at the urbanised middle class — traditionally too lazy or too cynical to vote. Never before has this section been so critical of the TDP which, under N.T. Rama Rao, has banked on the rural and female voters. Naidu's USP, on the other hand, has been his IT obsession, the introduction of electronic governance and power sector reforms backed by the World Bank — concepts alien to the rural voter where Naidu must bank on grass-roots administrative reforms and the image of his legislators.

Will all this work? Some partymen, used to NTR's rather arbitrary style of functioning, are wary of the intellectualisation and the tough regimentation in the TDP. They understand anarchy better.

But Naidu has a lot at stake in these polls. A victory will mean not just a return to political power but a personal vindication — to the Opposition no doubt, but more importantly to himself and his partymen — that his reforms have worked with the people. That, at least, he was headed in the right direction. •

Sarita Rani/Hyderabad



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 8 AUGUST, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

Your powers of recall are likely to be in a sorry state. You may have great difficulties in fishing out memories from the depths of your mind. But it is important not to invent things instead of accurate information. New friendships can be made with people from distant places.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

With a bit of luck, you may be able to tide over pending work, so that entertainment plans can be implemented. Enjoy a visit to the theatre, movies or restaurant. There is every chance that you will meet a prospective romantic partner. Existing relationships will go from strength to strength.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Although the conditions will be much to your liking, there will be little opportunity for making the most of them. You will probably have to hang about at work with little to do and unable really to relax or enjoy yourself. The company of children can be delightful and full of lively remarks.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

Exaggeration and embellishment should be left out of picture. You could earn more by taking some work home to do over the week. People who have the final say in important matters will be sitting on the fence. Promotion offers are in the pipeline, so be patient.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

Whole new horizons can open up for you. Your life can suddenly take on a new direction. You may become absorbed in new interests which allow your energies constructive outlets. Why not join study and self improvement classes? You may meet prospective romantic partners.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

This can be a time you would prefer to forget. You are likely to be all at sixes and sevens. Plans and arrangements can go badly wrong. People who would normally be helpful and supportive may prove unreliable. Household members cannot be relied on. Conditions are not encouraging for travel.

SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

The week begins on a relatively easy-going note. Demands and pressures should be off you for the time being. Try clearing the decks and tidying up. Try bringing outstanding affairs to a close, leaving the way ahead for an active week. Fresh initiatives may be shot down rather than being accepted.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

Problems and complications can arise if you take on distant travel. You should now be prepared to push hard bargain negotiations and high-level discussions. Don't worry about upsetting others. Go all-out to get the terms you find acceptable. Offering guidance to colleagues is favoured.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

Don't bite off more than you can chew. You can get ahead of yourself by taking on jobs or responsibilities for which you are ill-equipped or lack sufficient experience. It is essential to be realistic and down-to-earth. Commitments should not be made unless you can carry them out.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

It is best to keep your expectations fairly low where new suggestions and ideas submitted to colleagues are concerned. Rather than pushing things, it is better to give people plenty of time to acclimatize themselves to futuristic plans.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

You may become a little too obsessed with business partnership problems. You need to step back and see them in their true perspective. A more humorous approach to difficult people can save a lot of worry. Don't take things too seriously.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

People in positions of power and authority can be far from reliable. There's not much chance of getting them to acquiesce to special favours. Unscrupulous people may come knocking at your door so try not getting into any sort of agreement with them.

Matter of faith

Why is everybody in the finance ministry convinced that the current reshuffle of bureaucrats is valid only for the next two months and that N.K. Singh will become finance secretary eventually?

In what seems to be unsha-



N.K. Singh: will he have his way?

keable faith in Singh's abilities to get what he wants, everyone in the ministry says that this is a lame-duck government with a lame-duck bureaucracy. In just two months, the whole thing will be resolved and Singh will be back where he belongs.

So does that mean someone else will occupy the room currently held by Yashwant Sinha? 'May be, however, but, notwithstanding...' is the answer.

Why is the Indian bureaucrat so good at his job? Because he never speaks, only does.

On a plate

Currently, Ashok Lahiri, director of the National Institute of Public

HEARD IN BOMBAY

From Growmore, they should change their name to Groommore.

A FRUSTRATED INVESTOR, TRYING TO GET HIS MONEY BACK FROM GROWMORE FINANCIAL SERVICES, ONE OF THE HARSHAD MEHTA-HIT COMPANIES

Finance and Policy (NIPFP), Delhi, and money supply guru, is in the happy situation of holding down three jobs.

He came to the finance ministry on lien from the International Monetary Fund so that the job would be his whenever he wanted to return to Washington.

The finance ministry has sent him on lien to the NIPFP, so if he doesn't like being at the institute, he can always return to the ministry and his avatar as a bureaucrat.

And at the NIPFP, he has all the perks of being the boss.

That we should all be so lucky!

Reign of confusion

There is complete confusion in North Block. In the Beginning of Time, when the finance secretary used to double up as secretary economic affairs, everything was clear cut. The same man was the finance ministry's representative on myriad panels and committees — from the ministry of finance's representation on the Committee to Study the Implementation of Hindi in Government Work to MoF's nominee on the Reserve Bank panel, all the files were sent to the same person.

Then you had a change and a separate man was appointed secretary economic affairs. The last most famous secretary economic affairs was Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

Then, inexplicably, for



Montek Singh Ahluwalia: the most famous one

six years there was no secretary in the department of economic affairs. Once again the job reverted to the finance secretary. It went on so long that people forgot there had been a separate man for the job.

Now that the expenditure secretary has been given charge of economic affairs, it is all confusion again. All kinds of cross-connections are happening in the finance ministry — people have forgotten what the department of economic affairs used to deal with.

It will take some time before all the administrative muddles are sorted out. •

BAROMETER

Economic ministers: how they've performed



Ramakrishna Hegde: What a spectacular disaster! Fought with the finance ministry, introduced no initiative worth talking about, told half-truths about export figures..



Yashwant Sinha: At last the economy has stabilised and is on the road to recovery. Sinha's cool-headed handling has paid dividends.



Vazhappadi Ramamurthy: Has anyone heard anything about the new things the petroleum ministry has done? A lacklustre performance.



Rangarajan Kumaramangalam: Has tried to introduce some discipline in the power sector, especially setting up regulatory tariff boards at the state level. Has hurried projects along. One of the most sought after ministers in the government today.



Nitish Kumar: A competent railway minister but nothing to write home about. His railway Budget was status quoist. A pity, because Nitish Kumar isn't.

RANDOM NOTES

Election issues

■ Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu has a curious problem. He finds there are no takers for Lok Sabha seats. The rules of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) are well known by now: all aspirants for tickets have to submit their requests for TDP nominations with a bank draft of Rs 10,000. The process is

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

It began as Janata Dal. When Deve Gowda became PM, it became Janata Sambar. Now, with our leaders claiming Vajpayee is India's best PM, it should start calling itself Janata Daida.

A DISGUSTED SUPPORTER OF THE JANATA DAL

Sangh matters

■ With rumours gaining ground that L.K. Advani may not contest the Lok Sabha elections, talk has also started about who will take on the mantle of the party presidency from Kushabhau Thakre.

One name, which was doing the rounds earlier as well, is Sushma Swaraj's. Her decision to stay out of the fray in the polls and con-



Chandrababu Naidu: facing a problem

transparent and straight-forward.

But take the Anakapalle Lok Sabha seat. The sitting MP doesn't want to contest and no one can be found to fight the seat because every one argues that if the Lok Sabha is going to last only two years, there is no point in spending large sums of money for a two-year term.

There are aspirants aplenty for the Assembly elections. But no one wants a Lok Sabha ticket.

Home truth

■ In a quiet, silent move, former Delhi Police Commissioner M.J. Kaul (who incidentally

has been the longest serving CP, with a four-year tenure) has been appointed special secretary in the home ministry, the job which Nikhil Kumar was doing earlier.

This is news to most people. Everyone was under the impression that T.R. Kakkar, another CP from Delhi, was the one to have got the job. But Kakkar has been moved out (whether he ever joined his new posting or not is a mystery) and Kaushal has been the biggest beneficiary of the shift.

Nikhil Kumar is handling the National Security Guards (NSG) now and would be justified in believing that he has been victimised.

CHECK-LIST

Haryana: what really happened

■ **How the crisis began:** The Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) led by Bansi Lal went into a minority as BJP withdrew support, because of the HVP's corruption. Sonia Gandhi offered to shore up Bansi Lal to make up.

■ **The actors:** Sonia Gandhi and Bansi Lal. The agreement was that Lal would dissolve the Assembly. He went back on his word, so 10 days after offering support, the Congress withdrew from the deal.

■ **Who intervened:** Om Prakash Chautala, rebels from Bansi Lal's party, and the BJP. The BJP which already owed Chautala for his help in the vote of confidence, agreed to help Chautala from the outside if he could get enough HVP rebels to cross the floor and help him form the government.

■ **The result:** Chautala is chief minister, elections have been averted and the BJP is supporting the government from outside. If Chautala doesn't behave himself, that government will fall as well.



Sushma Swaraj: BJP's next president?

centrate on campaigning, has been noted approvingly by the RSS and L.K. Advani. Both are keen that she try her hand at running the party.

Can this happen? Not if Pramod Mahajan and Madan Lal Khurana have their way. •

Screen effect

■ Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is terribly taken with *Godmother*. Information minister Pramod Mahajan held a special screening of the film for various ministers and bureaucrats at Delhi's Mahadev Road auditorium. The screening was held at

HEARD IN PMO

We're still reeling from the Bijli effect.

BUREAUCRATS WHO COULDN'T TEAR THEMSELVES AWAY FROM SANGEETA BIJLANI WHO VISITED PMO WITH HUSBAND AZHARUDDIN RECENTLY

ing the DTH system in operation would be resolved. So they know they would have had to give the contract for the hardware out to some private firm. Someone or other would have raised an objection at this. And heads would inevitably have rolled. So DD officialdom is happy that the decision has been postponed.



A.B. Vajpayee: appreciated Godmother

the request of the PM's foster-daughter Namita who wanted to see it. Mahajan wasn't really sure if the PM would come. Much to his surprise not only did he see the film he also stayed right till the end.

Vajpayee wanted to see the film to satisfy himself about all the fuss it has caused.

Great relief

■ The government may be raging at the Election Commission's decision to bar it from going ahead with the Direct To Home Plan (DTH). But there are some people who are deeply relieved.

Officials in Doordarshan have no clue what DTH means, what kind of equipment is needed or even how the glitches arising from putt-



L.K. Advani: unnoticed by FICCI

CHECK-LIST

Party hoppers in parties

■ **Nina Pillai:** Having made a career out of holding wild parties, Nina Pillai, widow of biscuit king Rajan Pillai, has joined a rather more sedate one: the Congress. She's hoping to contest the next Lok Sabha elections from Kerala. The *haute couture* now is Khadi and Pearls, darling! Will she get a ticket? Highly unlikely.

■ **Navin Patnaik:** His partying days were over when he became a minister, and now, sadly his party seems to be over too. With the changing political landscape in Orissa after the split in the Janata Dal, Patnaik will have a hard time keeping his flock together.

■ **Suresh Kalmadi:** The most benign party throwers of them all, Kalmadi has also joined the Congress, just to spite Sharad Pawar. It remains to be seen how he will keep Pune in the family.

■ **Vasundhara Raje:** As minister of state in the ministry of external affairs, her career had come to consist of attending parties. Hopefully, when the BJP comes to power again, she will be given a portfolio of some consequence.

Guess who came?

■ Why was home minister L.K. Advani not feted and welcomed by FICCI?

At the recent function 'Shraddhanjali' to raise funds for soldiers in Kargil, organised by FICCI, the Prime Minister and the President were seated on the dais and referred to in glowing terms. Rahul Dravid and Sonali Bendre were on hand to give bouquets.

But everyone seemed to have missed L.K. Advani who sat among the audience with a smile on his face, and the picture of dignity, left quietly at the end of the function. No one even called out his name to felicitate him.

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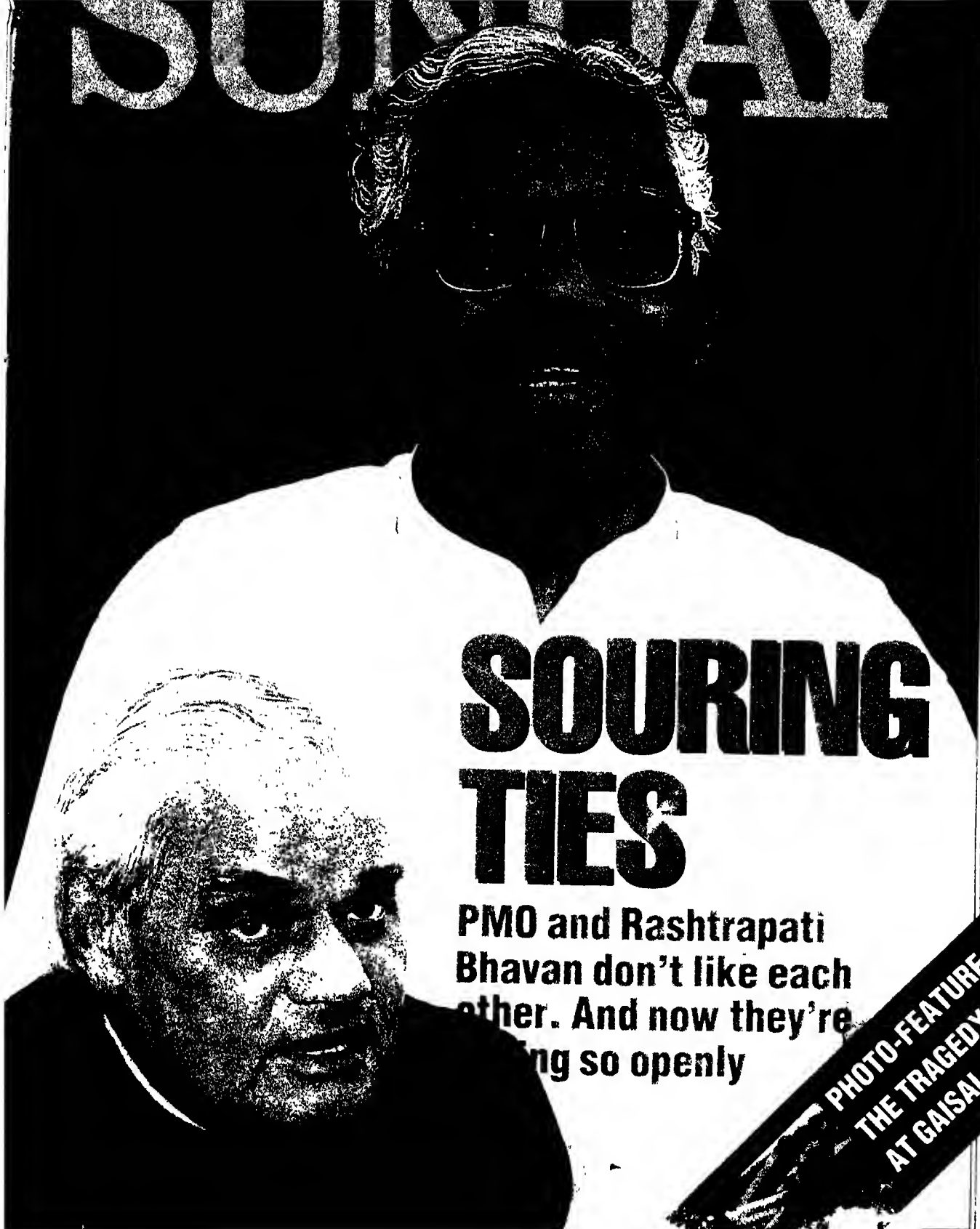
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For further details and risk factors please refer to the Offer Document

ISSUE OPEN FROM JULY 27, 1999 TO AUGUST 19, 1999

MOTHER TERESA: ON THE ROAD TO SAINTHOOD

SUNDAY



SOURING TIES

PMO and Rashtrapati
Bhavan don't like each
other. And now they're
talking so openly

**PHOTO-FEATURE:
THE TRAGEDY
AT GAISAL**

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Souring ties

PMO and Rashtrapati Bhavan don't like each other. And now they're saying so openly

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Death trail

The tragedy at Gaisal



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By God's grace

The canonisation process of Mother Teresa begins



Sharif Badmash

This refers to the cover story *Benazir Bhutto* (1—7 August). It has been rightly pointed out by the former Pakistani Prime Minister that the Kargil conflict has isolated her nation. The Kargil misadventure has made its military generals and religious fundamentalists realise that no war, not even a jihad, is going to alter the LoC.

Mrs Bhutto said that Sharif had to please US President Bill Clinton to survive. And that Sharif could even

go to the extent of appeasing Atal Behari Vajpayee and the Mujahideens to survive at the top.

She has rightly alleged that Sharif had betrayed Pakistan, the prospects of an Indo-Pak peace and the cause of Kashmiris. I think it's time Sharif understood realpolitik and refrained from popular gimmicks to hold his office.

Deepa Kapoor, Bombay (Maharashtra)

I agree with former Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto's allegations and accusations against Nawaz Sharif. The present Pakistani Prime Minister has stabbed India at its back by pushing intruders across the LoC.

Only a few months back, Nawaz Sharif had promised Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee that the Lahore Peace process and the Bus Diplomacy would mark the beginning of a new era of peace in Indo-Pak relations. But while India took these peace overtures for granted, Sharif betrayed Vaj-

payee by sending mercenaries across the border. And in the process, escalated the crisis in Kargil.

The two-month old war in Kargil has ended, but the fact that so much loss of life could have been avoided had Nawaz Sharif stuck to his words.

Samir Chakraborty, Howrah (West Bengal)

Sad story

This refers to the special report *The middle rung* (18—24 July). It's pathetic that a sycophant like Digvijay Singh is only a pawn and a puppet in the hands of the shrewd Italian *bahurani* who has mastered the Machiavellian politics of Indira Gandhi and is referred to by the Congress cronies as 'Madam' or the high command.

Sonia has made it abundantly clear that she is the 'supremo' and infallible contender for the 'gaddi' and will brook no opposition or rivalry.

G.I. D'souza, Bangalore (Karnataka)

Costly misadventure

Despite Pakistan Gen. Pervez Musharraf's operational brilliance of standing up to our mighty army, the Pakistani government has not been able to take political mileage and has unwittingly put its foot into its mouth by claiming that the Kashmiri insurgency is wholly indigenous (*Guns of Kargil*, 27 June—3 July). This clearly speaks of the lack of coordination between the army chief and the government.

No wonder, as the Kargil debacle sinks in, Pakistan is undergoing a collective bout of self-flagellation.

Nalini Sudhakaran, Trivandrum (Karnataka)



Sharad Pawar: the rebel

Three musketeers

Whatever be the final outcome of Sharad Pawar's rebellion against the Congress president Sonia Gandhi, along with P.S. Sangma and Tariq Anwar (*Pawar crisis*, 27 June—3 July), the three musketeers have shown that Sonia isn't the only person who matters in the party. The rebel troika needs to be complimented for their voice of dissent.

Amarnath Kamat, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Food for thought

Our patriotism shows only in times of crisis (*People's war*, 4—10 July). Perhaps, each one of us has different notion of patriotism. Or else, why have we failed in our supreme duty of wiping tears from those who are suffering? I want to convey my grateful thanks to the writer for the excellent write-up. It has provided food for thought.

M. Abdul Salim, Port Blair (Andaman and Nicobar Islands)

The real hero

Thanks for the wonderful article on Atal Behari Vajpayee (*Can this man be*



Benazir Bhutto: pointing fingers at Nawaz Sharif

defeated? 25—31 July). Only some misguided people can point an accusing finger at him. He is loved and respected not for his intellectual accomplishments but for his courage of conviction, dedication to the national interests and commitment to lead a peaceful and prosperous India.



Atal Behari Vajpayee:
leading from the front

The Vajpayee of today is entirely different from the Vajpayee of 1996. Every stride he takes speaks of his robust confidence. The way he handled the Kargil issue has made him a hero
U.S. Iyer, Bangalore
(Karnataka)

Grand slam

This refers to the interview with Leander Paes 'I hope this shows that Indians can be world-beaters' (18—24 July). Showing remarkable team spirit Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi have consolidated their position as the world's No 1 doubles pair.

Today, Leander has three Wimbledon titles: the boys' singles from 1990 and the

men's doubles and the mixed doubles in 1999. Yet what lingers is his resoluteness, the ambition of a young boy, flickering on occasion but never fading.

If one looks at their (Paes and Bhupathi) career graph, one sees a tremendous upswing. Both have won prize money worth about Rs 28,000 in 1994. And what they had collected in 1998 is Rs 4.75 crore. What's more, they have won 15 titles out of the 19 finals they had reached in the last two years. That's indeed a commendable performance.

Bhaskar Lahiri, Kalyani (West Bengal)

War file

This refers to the photo-essay *Life on the line* and the cover story *The Indian jawan* (18—24 July) While the photo-feature unfolds the tough life of a soldier in the battlefield, the cover story glorifies our soldiers and heaps accolades on the jawans which they richly deserve

What our brave soldiers have achieved in an unbelievably difficult terrain of icy heights is unimaginable. Though electronic media has brought reality to almost



Mahesh Bhupathi (left) and Leander Paes: going great guns

every household, the photo-feature has refreshed the experience and supplemented these efforts.

Onkar Chopra, Ludhiana
(Punjab)

For the nation

This refers to the story *People's war* (4—10 July). It is so gratifying to see that Kargil has brought about a fierce patriotic upsurge throughout the country. Solidarity with the soldiers apart, it's a renewed expression of patriotism. People are identifying themselves with the sufferings and difficulties undergone by the soldiers at Kargil and are willing to do whatever they can to help the families of those who have laid down their lives to uphold the nation's territorial integrity. It's great to see the Indians have finally risen to the occasion. After all, the national interests should be above "self-interest".

L. Rohini, Tiruchy (Tamil Nadu)

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

PRIZES 200 FOR CONTRIBUTIONS



Santi Joshi
Cricketer



Sanjay Nirupam
Politician

Contributed by Nilima Banerjee, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

WADHWA CONSTITUTION: The involvement of any political or religious group in the killing of Graham Staines and his two sons, in Orissa, in January. Justice D.P. Wadhwa described the "ghastly murder" as an act of "hatred" by Darn Singh.

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SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH THE ASIAN AGE

■ The Indian government attaches high priority to strengthen international consensus against terrorism.

PRAMOD MAHAJAN, *information and broadcasting minister*

■ I am very concerned at the way bitterness is building up between the 'majority' and 'minority' schools in our party

JYOTI BASU, *West Bengal chief minister, on trouble within the CPM*

■ The biggest challenge the banking industry faces in the coming millennium is technology. Physical banking is losing much of its meaning with the onset of virtual banking.

G. G. VAIDYA, *chairman, State Bank of India*



■ Somebody will have to accept responsibility. As the minister, I accept it before other heads roll — which should roll.

NITISH KUMAR, *railway minister, announcing his decision to resign after the Gaisal train disaster*

■ One did not have to agree with him to admire his erudition

K. R. NARAYANAN, *President of India, on Nirad C. Chaudhuri*

■ What matters is that I be allowed to represent the country again... Breaking Kapil's record is precisely the reason why I would want to be in the playing squad.

WASIM AKRAM, *Pakistani cricket star*

■ If the censor board continues to believe the Indian mind to be far less mature than the rest of the world, I will bow to their greater wisdom and agree to an adult certificate.

SHEKHAR KAPUR, *film director, after Elizabeth ran into trouble with the Indian censor board*



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Particulars	Quarter ended 30-06-99	Quarter ended 30-06-98	Year ended 31-03-99 (Audited)
INCOME			
Interest Earned	165.26	139.97	593.55
Other Income	23.32	33.97	82.86
TOTAL	188.58	173.94	676.41
EXPENDITURE			
Interest Expended	128.48	135.30	478.81
Operating Expenses	15.00	13.60	66.17
TOTAL	143.48	148.90	544.98
OPERATING PROFIT	45.10	25.04	131.43
Depreciation on Fixed Assets	5.56	4.91	20.98
Provisions and Contingencies	14.52	4.70	73.65
NET PROFIT	25.02	15.43	36.80
Paid up Equity Share Capital	158.91	157.86	158.91
Reserves	395.75	370.25	370.73
Net Worth	545.74	515.99	520.08
Deposits	4374.59	3549.38	5018.42
Advances	2351.70	2312.64	2662.27

1. The above financial results were taken on record by the Board of Directors of the Bank at its meeting held on 30th July, 1999.
2. The working results for the quarter ended 30th June, 1999 have been arrived at after considering provisions for income tax, depreciation on investments and NPAs on pro-rata basis.
3. **Status report on Y2K Compliance** - The Bank is fully geared up to face the millennium change challenge. All internal hardware and software systems are Y2K compliant. A business resumption contingency plan is being drawn up to maintain all mission critical operations and protect customer interest. The cost of all these efforts has been placed at around Rs.83 Lacs.
4. Figures of the previous quarter ended 30th June, 1998 have been regrouped and reclassified wherever necessary

Sd/-

Mumbai
July 30, 1999.

K. R. Maheshwari
(Managing Director)

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NAC-5402/99

Shunning the

*Locking mediamen
out of the Election
Commission's office
may not be a good idea*

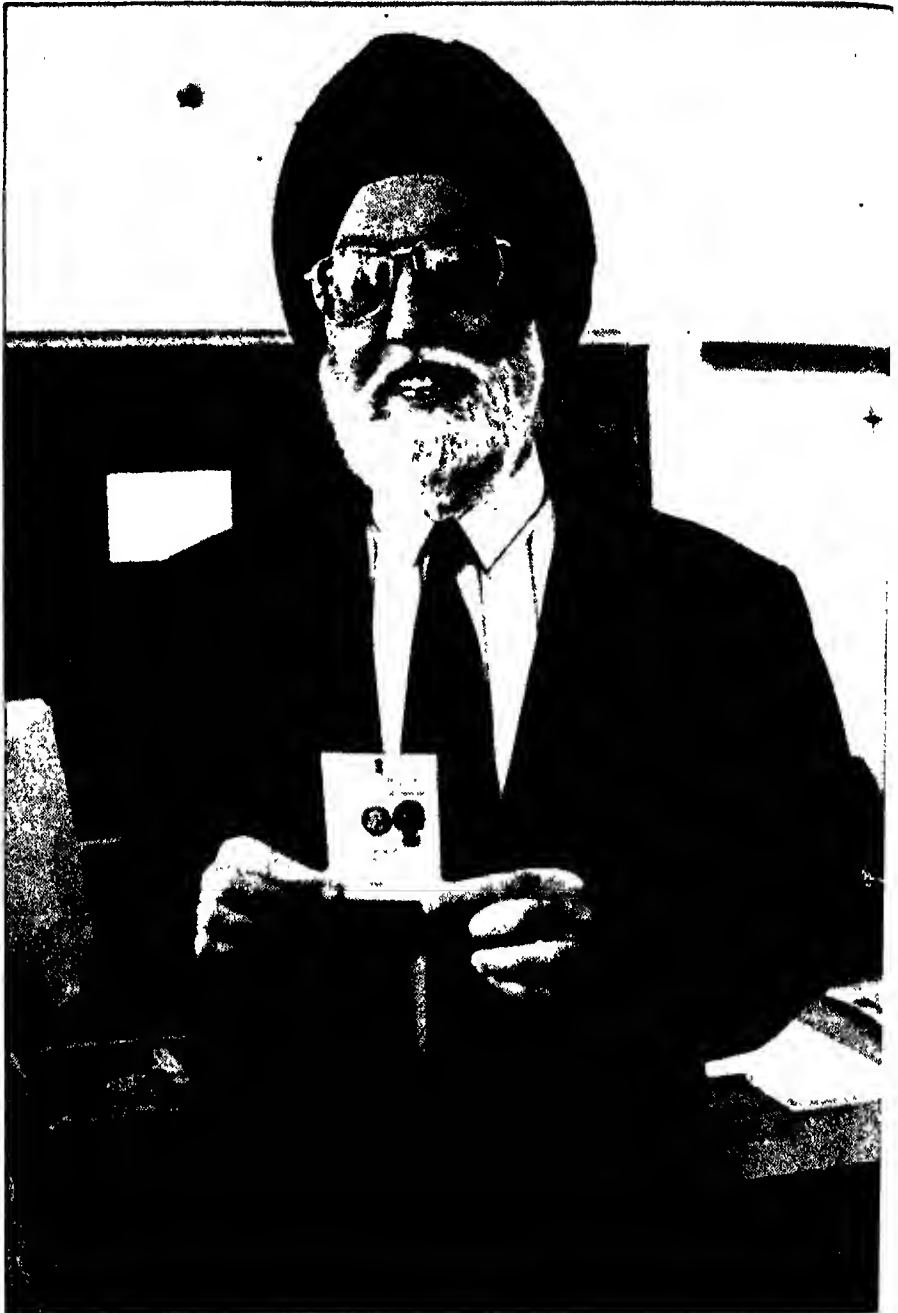
Those who had sneered at T.N. Seshan's antics and had written him off as a publicity hound, probably deserve no better than M.S. Gill, the current chief election commissioner (CEC). Initially, after taking over from Seshan, mindful of his predecessor's image, Gill played it low-key and was very media-friendly in a self-effacing sort of manner.

During Seshan's regime, both Gill and the other election commissioner G.V. Krishnamurthy were regarded as the humble underdogs. In fact, the day Gill took over as the CEC, he held an informal press briefing in his office. Prominently displayed on his desk was a cut-out from a newspaper cartoon showing both Gill and Krishnamurthy peeping from a window sill into Seshan's room with the words: Has he gone yet?

Well, he had finally gone and Gill could now climb up the window sill and walk right into the room. Initially, most journalists expected the same kind of rapport as they had enjoyed with him earlier. And in the beginning, Gill remained as affable as ever. He displayed his usual Punjabi bonhomie, responded to telephone calls and was always available to clarify any doubts, however small. But slowly things began to change.

During the 1998 Lok Sabha polls, Gill shut the journalists out of the Election Commission itself. The gates of Nirvachan Sadan clanged shut and the press was informed that it was not allowed inside, and asked to sit outside in a shed-like structure constructed for the purpose.

And when Gill used to descend from his office to leave for home, the media (i.e. cameramen) was allowed to get close to him. He would beam with delight and deliver the soundbite for the day.



M.S. Gill's contention is that having a bunch of journalists around hampers work. But there has to be some way of getting the commission's message across

press

There was a saving grace in the form of a daily press-briefing by the spokesperson and deputy election commissioner Subash Panni. This year, this has been discontinued. No one is allowed to speak to the press, save Gill himself, and occasionally — when he can get away with it — Krishnamurthy. Whatever information has to be imparted is circulated through Rajesh Malhotra, the information officer at the PIB. While Malhotra is accessible enough, he often does not have the required information to fill in the blanks. He can only hand out whatever press release he has been asked to, and is in no position to give any additional clarifications. Unfortunately, the press notes from the EC usually consist only of relevant paragraphs from the various orders issued and decisions taken by the commission (instead of the whole document). The scope for misunderstanding and hence misreporting is so much more than average.

Of course, there are the not-so-infrequent times when Gill himself holds a press-briefing. However, he usually begins these meetings with a preface. I will read out a few relevant portions for the electronic media.

After posing and posturing for the cameras, Gill then turns his attention to the galaxy of print journalists waiting patiently, and condescends to answer the minimum of questions. But no follow-ups are allowed.

So then, if Gill is so inaccessible and media-unfriendly, why is he being seen as such a publicity junkie?

Well, that's because he is not exactly media-shy. It's just that he doesn't want to waste time answering too many questions (which tend to involve long and tedious clarifications) for tenacious print journalists, when he can easily spend that time in a television studio, or airing his views in front of a TV camera. Such as his recent interview to a private channel asking political parties to give adequate representations to women candidates, for instance.

In fact, Gill is more television savvy than his predecessors. Last year, when he was asked to appear on a television



Nirvachan Sadan: since the 1996 Lok Sabha elections journalists have been shut out

programme by a private channel for a 3.30 to 4.00 pm slot he told the surprised producers to slate him for the 9.00 pm slot instead — for, according to Gill, the afternoon slot had a viewership of only 40 per cent, while the one in the evening was a prime-time catch!

Again, the Election Commission provisions of no political candidates and canvassing on TV (or elsewhere) 48 hours before the polls makes it very difficult for TV anchors to find the adequate guests to fill up the various chat shows and election-oriented programmes slated around the polls. When a TV producer complained to Gill, the CEC reportedly said, "No problem, I can come!" Unfortunately, with the elections staggering over as many as five phases, there is going to be a lot of prime-time programmes starring M.S. Gill and company.

Sadly, this kind of selective accessibility has not gone down well in an era where the Election Commission is playing an important role — for it is not only monitoring the election process, but also keeping a close eye on government policy and checking to see if the ruling coal-

tion sticks to the model code of conduct. Take the EC's recent intervention in the new telecom policy, for instance.

At such a time, the EC has to be open to questions and clarifications from the media in general, rather than focussing on a few select interviews. Gill's reasons for locking the press out of Nirvachan Sadan are probably valid (the commission probably ranks as high as the defence ministry in its inaccessibility to the press). He says that having a bunch of journalists running around the place would hamper the commission's work.

Fair enough. But there has to be some way of getting the commission's message across — other than two or three paragraphs of the decisions taken by the commission in the form of handouts to the press. And apart from the two-second soundbites delivered by the CEC as he descends down the stairs from his office in the EC and leaves for his house.

In other words, the EC needs to be more transparent. After all, isn't that what the elections are all about? •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

Farmhouse pollsters

Motivated opinion polls must not be allowed to confuse the electorate



It has been noticed that a number of pre-poll surveys are appearing in different newspapers. The chief election commissioner, M.S. Gill, should intervene and ensure that the electorate is not confused by the mushrooming opinion poll agencies.

Of course, there are some agencies which have been doing this job for several elections in the past. The MARG-India Today survey has got a credible impact. Two or three other surveys have also reached somewhere near the actual results. But from the way these surveys are appearing, it seems that some politi-

cal parties are trying to plant them to create a hype in their favour.

One such survey came from Los Angeles and another one from Janak Puri (Delhi). It cannot be ruled out that these temporary agencies are sponsored by political parties and in order to create a favourable atmosphere.

If one goes through all the newspapers — national and regional — more than ten pre-poll surveys have appeared. Half of them have given the BJP around 200 seats and half of them have given the Congress around 180 seats. One survey has given the BJP combine 300 seats while another has given the Congress alone 250 seats.

It seems that no methodology has been applied in conducting these doctor-ed surveys. These are fabricated in draw-

ing rooms or on the computers sitting in one room purely on the basis of instructions from the bosses of various political parties.

If the Election Commission asks for the samples to be submitted, these temporary agencies will not be able to do so. How can a person sitting in Los Angeles assess the voting pattern of rural India and that too, two months before the elections?

Certain surveys are based on personal biases. For instance, former Union minister Arun Nehru is coming out with poll surveys on a weekly basis which no agency can do in spite of its huge set-up. It is interesting to know that he is able to assess the mood of the people every week without any network being set up. He has given a new type of election survey, called 'farmhouse psephology'.

Nehru is most of the time confined to his farmhouse at Mehrauli in Delhi and hardly goes out. How can he gauge the mood of the entire country from the sprawling lawns of his five-star farmhouse? He never comes to Parliament where he can meet at least a few politicians and journalists to get some feedback. He also does not like to meet more than a few people at home.

I am not able to understand what is the basis of his weekly predictions other than pure imagination or biased speculation. But because of his personality and stature he gets space for his farcical surveys in prominent newspapers and magazines.

Arun Nehru has got tremendous amount of political understanding and is a good political analyst. He should only write political columns giving his analysis instead of becoming a psephologist. Everybody knows that he hates Sonia Gandhi and that is why he has launched his canard through his poll surveys.

He has got every right to criticise Sonia, but he should do it in his columns instead of doing so in the garb of poll predictions and opinion polls. If he continues to do so he may lose his credibility as a columnist also, as he has already lost as a politician. •



Arun Nehru has got every right to criticise Sonia Gandhi, but he should do it in his columns instead of doing so in the garb of poll predictions and opinion polls

After the war

Now that the dust has settled over Kargil, what are India's options?

If any proof was needed that Pakistan is a client state, it was provided by the Clinton-Nawaz Sharif meeting on 4 July in Washington. Sharif was suitably admonished. The real problem is that the client has acquired another client in the form of the global terrorist network being spawned on Pakistani soil. The client's client is a threat to its patron — though not saint — the United States.

This explains the apparent shift we are seeing in the diminishing US support for Pakistan in the Kargil context. There are other factors as well. All is not well with the US-Chinese relationship. The issue of Taiwan, theft of nuclear secrets from the US, the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the increasing defence ties between China and the Taliban are all contributing to the unease in what was once a cosy relationship. The Republicans in the US are distinctly disenchanted with China; there is a decline in business interests in that country and India is becoming more attractive.

Although the intruders have withdrawn from our side of the LoC, the Americans may have entered from the backdoor. There is little doubt the BJP government has agreed to sign the CTBT and will begin negotiations on the FMCT. The problem remains Kashmir, there is no solution as Pakistan cannot compromise on its claims to the valley and cannot accept the LoC as the international border. US pressure for an Indo-Pak dialogue is building up.

The dialogue will lead nowhere and will remain the fig leaf for intensifying Pakistani-backed terrorism in Kashmir. Having been evicted from Kargil, the inevitable result will be stepping up of ISI insurgency in J&K and in the rest of India. Faced with this reality, what options does India have?

1) We could continue in the same manner as we have done since 1989. Have the sometimes-on-sometimes-off dialogue and accept increased deaths at the hands of Pakistani terrorists all over India.

2) Embrace the so-called Gujral

doctrine, once again start the appeasement of Pakistan and the Taliban. This will adversely affect national security. We may end up losing Kashmir and whatever self-respect we have left as a nation.

3) Kargil has demonstrated the urgent need for upgradation of our military preparedness and our weapon systems. If

ward. It would not amount to mediation as neither India or Pakistan would have asked for it.

However, if at the end of the dialogue (we have to set a time limit) there is no progress, then we would need to look at our options once again. We could also consider, at that time, declaring Pakistan



The angry hills: Kargil has become a diplomatic turning point for India

Pakistan also goes on an arms-buying spree, it will cripple the fragile Pakistani economy.

4) The constant hope for a strong, democratic and stable Pakistan is a mirage. There are inbuilt seeds of instability and self-destruction. India should lend a helping hand in strengthening democracy in Pakistan and should support Pakistan's oppressed ethnic minorities. In this you have a readymade recipe for the Balkanisation or Lebanonisation of Pakistan which has proved itself to be a failed state.

We have to begin a dialogue for the sake of the global understanding we have received. If the international community wishes to find a solution to Kashmir, without direct mediation, it can do so by pressing for the LoC to be declared the international border. Having firmly demanded respect for the sanctity of the LoC, this is the obvious logical step for-

a terrorist state. Thereafter, we would be well within our right to undertake surgical airstrikes on training camps and heroin-producing factories in Pakistan/Afghanistan wherever the targets may be located. The US and Israel have done this time and again wherever their interests have been threatened.

Present estimates indicate revenues from drug sales from this area to be anywhere between US \$ 3-12 billion annually. This is enough to finance global terrorism for years to come.

The most serious obstacle to this course of action is not Pakistan but our beloved political leaders. They always prefer the soft options, they are desperate to win Nobel Peace Prize. They are incapable of using the iron fist and even when the velvet glove is brought out, the hand inside is usually limp. •

The author retired as secretary MEA, Government of India



SOURING TIES

Given his background and political beliefs, K.R. Narayanan will do what is decent and correct, but will never go out of his way to help this government. The President distrusts the BJP and its allies and cannot rid himself of the feeling that they have an ulterior agenda

PMO and Rashtrapati Bhavan don't like each other. And now they're saying so openly

It was the day the Pakistan Army announced it was withdrawing from the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC). The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) got a call from Rashtrapati Bhavan. The President was holding a screening of Shyam Benegal's latest film, *Samar*. Would the PM like to come for it?

The PM would have loved to, but, unfortunately, he was leaving town, for Guwahati the next day, said PMO. Please thank the President on our behalf. Rashtrapati Bhavan, therefore, did not send the PM an invitation in writing.

Principal secretary to PM Brajesh Mishra, was the one to convey to the President the news that Pakistan had decided to withdraw. The director-general military operations talked to each other at 2.30 pm. By 6.30 pm, it was confirmed that Pakistan was backing off. Mishra drove to Rashtrapati Bhavan to officially inform the President of the development. There, he met Gopal Gandhi, secretary to the President, who was in the basement theatre. Gandhi told him that the President was busy with the film screening, to which the PM was invited but couldn't come because he was travelling. If it was urgent, he said, the President could meet Mishra.

Mishra said he didn't want to disturb the President in the middle of his engagement. He had come only to inform him about the Kargil development. Mishra left after exchanging pleasantries.

Points of View



The world according to Rashtrapati Bhavan

- 1) This government doesn't seem to realise that it has lost the confidence of the Parliament. It is behaving with unbelievable arrogance, riding roughshod over every convention of parliamentary democracy.
- 2) Ministers are criticising the institution of the President. This is completely unacceptable.
- 3) How can correspondence between the President and the Prime Minister be leaked to the media? Surely there must be some things which are sacrosanct?
- 4) The President has been so worried about the escalation of all the controversies the government has been getting involved in that he's had to clarify his doubts from bureaucrats. Even this has been criticised.
- 5) The President is answerable to history; he is conscious that he has a duty to perform. Why does everyone keep calling him interventionist?

The world according to PMO

- 1) We have been given charge of caretaking till the elections; we will take care of the country the way we deem fit. The President has a right to make suggestions. But we are not bound by those.
- 2) Some ministers have criticised the President. But the PM has reproved them and they've been made to apologise.
- 3) Yes, leaks do happen. Call them lapses. But none of them are deliberate. We have also noted Rashtrapati Bhavan's opinions reported by editors on the front pages.
- 4) Bureaucrats report to their ministers. If Rashtrapati Bhavan has a doubt, it is the minister who should sort it out, not the bureaucrat.
- 5) The President wants a place in history. Nothing wrong in that except that he may be seen as becoming a pawn in the hands of forces opposed to the BJP, who want to create differences between the President and the PM. We have evidence of this.



It was with surprise and anger that the PMO responded to calls from reporters soon after, asking why the PM had not been invited to a screening of 'some film' in Rashtrapati Bhavan. Sonia Gandhi and Kanshi Ram had been called even Shabana Azmi and Ajit Jogi. But not the Prime Minister of India.

The implications were that relations between the government and the *rashtrapati* had plummeted to such a low that now Atal Behari Vajpayee was 'boycotting' Rashtrapati Bhavan functions (one rumour had it that the *rashtrapati* was pointedly ignoring the PM, not even inviting him to functions).

It didn't help that Vajpayee's trip got cancelled. It was now a semi-official rumour the President and the Prime Minister were not talking to each other.

No one is denying there is a problem. The question is how serious is it? The government is unhappily accepting

its part of the blame for the deterioration of the PMO-Rashtrapati Bhavan relationship. Last week, minister for power Rangarajan Kumaramangalam appeared on a television debate on the role of the President. When attorney general Soli Sorabjee pointed out that the President's role was akin to that of a 'watch-dog', Kumaramangalam retorted: "Watchdog ke pas kya yeh adhikar bhi hai ki woh kisi ko katey ya kha jaye (Does a watchdog have the right to bite and chew up people as well)?" Knowing Kumaramangalam, this was probably just an unthinking, clever answer back. But the BJP went to great lengths to set right the damage this caused in the relationship it caused between 5, South Block and Raisina Hill.

Kumaramangalam has since been asked to say 'sorry' to the President. The orders have come from the PM himself. Kumaramangalam has been asked to apologise at 'the same forum where he made the offensive remark'.

The same thing happened with petroleum minister Vazhapadi Ramamurthy who, during a public speech in Madras, made some highly intemperate remarks against the President of India. He has been reproved by the government and from all accounts, agreed to apologise.

Sometimes, the government also gets its wires crossed. Take the case of Ram Jethmalani. The disenfranchisement of Balasaheb Thackeray was held in abeyance for nearly a year by the law ministry. When Ram Jethmalani took over as law minister he decided to apply his mind to it. The case was simple. Thackeray had made some inflammatory and communal speeches during an election campaign. On the basis of judgements in the High Court and the Supreme Court, the Election Commission (EC) sent its recommendation to the President that in its opinion, Thackeray should be disqualified from voting for six years.

The President, careful not to strip any individual of his right to vote, even if it was so ordered by the court, sent the matter to the law ministry for comments. Because the then law minister was Thambi Durai, the law department of the law ministry did not act on this matter. The President's secretariat, too, kept quiet about it.

But then, Ram Jethmalani became law minister. He wrote to the President of India, asking him to ask the EC to change its opinion. How could the commission do that? Its view was based on the judgement passed previously by the

apex court of India. It communicated to the President its inability to do so. Meanwhile, some public statements were also made by the government on the delay on the matter of Bal Thackeray's disenfranchisement, with the hint that the President was holding it up.

The President's secretariat immediately forwarded the EC's comments back to the law ministry. Now there was no option. The draft of the order disenfranchising Bal Thackeray was signed by the President on that day itself.

Tarun Bharat and Siamna, both newspapers which support the *sangh parivar*, wrote editorials attacking the President and suggested that the Presi-

upset the BJP is that he has been publicly giving vent to his feelings.

The government is absolutely clear on this issue. Several ministers have crossed the line of control. But they have immediately been pulled up and reproved by the Prime Minister. In fact, the Prime Minister feels he has been embarrassed by some of his ministers.

If the PM had not stepped in, and had let the campaign against the *rashtrapati* gain ground, it would have been an act of deliberate undermining of Rashtrapati Bhavan. We have much to say sorry to the President for, says the government. But why should the whole government be put on the defensive for the mistakes



K.R. Narayanan with Sonia Gandhi: critics of the President believe that it was he who advised the Opposition to bring the government down

dent had used the disenfranchisement issue as a kind of lever of power, using it only on the eve of the general elections to make sure Bal Thackeray was kept out of the scene. But it was the government itself which had hurried the issue along and brought it to a head. How could the President be blamed? The law minister did not help matters by meeting the President, apologising and telling him that the whole thing was a gigantic mistake, a fault of one of the joint secretaries in his ministry.

So there have been occasions when the President has felt he's been wronged. Under normal circumstances, he might have kept quiet. What has

of a few ministers, which were not deliberate any way? And should the President's office be telling sundry journalists 'its side' of the story? Shouldn't the PMO be the more appropriate channel of communication?

The PM-President tension — such as it is — has spilled out into public view, especially after the Vajpayee government became a caretaker government.

In a way, this is quite natural. The Constitution is silent on the relationship between the government and the President after Lok Sabha elections are declared. The EC plays a major part in deciding their roles. And so does convention.



K.R. Narayanan with wife Saba

First among equals

Why K.R. Narayanan expects to be taken seriously

It is hard not to admire President K.R. Narayanan. A Dalit from a remote village in Kerala, from an extremely poor family, he rose to great intellectual heights. Not only was he a student of Harold Laski's, he was also a direct recruit to the Indian Revenue Service, interviewed by none less than Jawaharlal Nehru. He went on to become India's ambassador to the United States.

He was elected an equally illustrious political record. He took up arms against K. Karunakaran, at a time the latter was the indomitable strongman of the Congress in Kerala. When Karunakaran tried to deny him a Lok Sabha ticket, Narayanan petitioned Indira Gandhi who intervened to secure him the ticket. Even after that, he was given a seat which was a Marxist stronghold. He won it and won his political spurs.

So Narayanan is not a man who can be cowed down easily. And he is also a man who expects to be taken seriously.

Has the BJP gone wrong in its assessment of Narayanan? One thing

is clear. Given his background and political beliefs, Narayanan will do what is decent and correct, but will never go out of his way to help the BJP. The sooner the BJP realises this, the better. For the President belongs to the era when secularism meant greeting Muslim friends on Id and arguing that Kashmir's protected status was a guarantee of protection for India's minorities.

Nor will the BJP get anywhere by launching a whisper campaign about the nationality of the President's wife Usha (who is of Burmese origin) and son-in-law (who is American). Campaigns of this kind are both offensive and mean-minded.

The BJP must also remember that it is known as a party of upper caste interest groups. It cannot deny that there is a group of OBC and Dalits in the BJP itself who are struggling within the party for a place in the sun. Even for a person of average political intelligence, it is easy to make out this is a campaign to embarrass the party. And K.R. Narayanan is not a person of average political intelligence.

Soon after the government became a caretaker one, on 10 May, the President's office wrote a letter to the Cabinet secretary detailing all the things that the Chandra Shekhar government was not allowed to do after it became a minority government.

The Cabinet secretary, Prabhat Kumar, did what he was expected to do: he put up the letter to the Cabinet which discussed it. The minutes of the meeting, which thrashed the matter out, were sent to Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Apparently, this was not answer enough. The Rashtrapati Bhavan feels the government is so arrogant that it didn't even bother to reply to a communication from the President.

After this, several letters were sent by the President to the government on a variety of matters. Take the proposal of the urban development ministry to turn leasehold land into freehold. This could have put the property markets in a spin, and in a mildly-worded letter, the President let the government know that he thought it might be a better idea if an all-party meeting was convened and the proposal cleared there — in the absence of Parliament.

The government paid no attention to this.

But why should we, asks the government. The President has his own view of things. He has every right to seek clarifications and ask us for explanations, while we are a caretaker government. But we don't have to do everything he asks us to do.

And the government says it cannot be faulted on responding to every query, no matter how small, of the President even when it has transparently been prompted by the Opposition. Take the issue of the T-90 tanks. A piece of equipment which hasn't even been tested, about the purchase of which the government is yet to take a decision, became the subject of great agitation to a former Prime Minister. H.D. Deve Gowda and others wrote to the President asking him to intervene and stop the caretaker Vajpayee government from taking a decision on the purchase of T-90 tanks. PMO forwarded the letter to the defence ministry, which put all the papers together, along with a covering note by minister George Fernandes. Finally, the President himself concluded that and communicated to the government there was nothing wrong in what it had done.

Why does the President believe he is President only for the Opposition? He is



R. Kumaramangalam



Ram Jethmalani

also our President, says the government. Why should the President be a spokesman for the Opposition, says the BJP, less guardedly.

There is no doubt that the President has been conveying the misgivings of the Opposition to the government. The view Rashtrapati Bhavan takes is that if it receives representations, it has to forward them to the right quarters. Rashtrapati Bhavan feels it has done so mildly, making suggestions to a caretaker government, rather than issuing directions

Not always, retorts the BJP. What about the Rajya Sabha session? This is a tricky one

The Kargil conflict broke out when the government was in caretaker mode. The Opposition demanded that the government call a session of the Rajya Sabha to discuss Kargil. The government said it was ready to brief — as indeed it did — political parties on the war and answer all their questions. But it could not hold a session of Parliament where the discussions of the Upper House, where it was in minority, would become part of the statute.

The government's worst-case scenario was: the BJP is in minority in the Rajya Sabha. So the Opposition could gang up together to embarrass the government, even demand defence minister George Fernandes's resignation, tell the nation what a bunch of inefficient idiots were running the country, embarrass India internationally...

But obviously, all this could not be conveyed to the President. So when A.B. Vajpayee and K.R. Narayanan met



V. Ramamurthy

socially, Narayanan emphasised on the need to hold a Rajya Sabha session.

"I see your point," said the PM. "But I will have to ask my colleagues if they are in favour of such a session. I cannot call Rajya Sabha only because the Opposition demands it. I have to consult my own party as well."

As far as the PM was concerned, this was a social conversation. But obviously, to the President, this was a kind of commitment because Rashtrapati Bhavan followed up this meeting with a strongly-worded letter (PMO feels it was offensively worded) telling the PM that he was in a minority and implying that he either call a session or else...

The government decided to defy this directive. So they did. The reasoning was:

• If we'd been asked to call a Rajya Sabha session at the beginning of the conflict, we might even have done so. But after the heavy political criticism of the government, calling a session during

We have much to say sorry to the President for, says the government. But why should the whole government be put on the defensive for the mistakes of a few ministers?

the worst part of the war would have served no purpose.

• The demand came at a time when the international community was totally on our side. To show at that time that we were internally divided would have been bizarre — while the whole world was telling us how wonderfully restrained we'd been, it would have been impossible to restrain the Shiv Sena, say, from saying we should cross the LoC. In the Rajya Sabha, this would have had some credence. Is that what the Opposition wanted?

• Any criticism of the government would have given comfort to Pakistan. As it is, the Congress president's speeches which were critical of the government were circulated in Pakistan to say it is not only Pakistan which is divided on Kargil, so are the Indians.

Anyway, the government decided to reject the President's suggestion for the session.

But there was another reason for this.

Line of control

Where does politics stop and the President take over?

It began in 1949. Just when the Constituent Assembly was winding up its work on drafting the Indian Constitution, Baba Rajendra Prasad, the only President of India to have got two terms as President, rudely shook the government awake.

He, a lifelong follower of Mahatma Gandhi, wanted to know what the Constitution of free India was going to do towards democratic decentralisation i.e. Panchayat Raj.

His letter to Jawaharlal Nehru appeared (was leaked?) in the newspapers as the major policy difference of opinion between the President and the Prime Minister. Jolted into political correctness, the Constituent Assembly hastily shoved democratic decentralisation into the Constitution as a DPSP (Directive Principle of State Policy — prescriptive, not statutory, for implementation by the state). Nehru later assuaged his guilt-conscience by setting up the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee to write a report on Panchayati Raj.

That's when it started. Politics continued to surround the office of the President of India through the 1960s and 70s, with the controversial election of V.V. Giri. After the Congress split of 1969, and President Zakir Husain's death in office, Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy was the favoured choice of the Syndicate, while Indira Gandhi made it known that she wanted Jagjivan Ram as President. V.V. Giri, who was vice-president, took over as acting President. Indira Gandhi knew the Syndicate would never agree to her choice; it didn't. The Congress Parliamentary Board sat together and discussed the matter. When the voting was done, Indira Gandhi lost the vote by one (later it transpired the dissenting vote was Y.B. Chavan's). Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy became the Congress's official candidate.

But Mrs Gandhi was too proud and intelligent to concede defeat. She knew that doing so would be giving



Baba Rajendra Prasad with Jawaharlal Nehru



Giani Zail Singh with Rajiv Gandhi

in to the Syndicate. She left soon after for Hyderabad. From there, she asked V.V. Giri to file his nomination as an Independent candidate. Although Sanjeeva Reddy was the official Congress candidate, Congressmen were asked,

in a test of loyalty, to vote according to their conscience. They voted for Indira Gandhi — and V.V. Giri.

The 1980s saw the highly public difference of opinion between President Giani Zail Singh and Rajiv Gandhi, on the powers of a President,

**V.V. Giri**

specifically, on the question of sacking a Prime Minister. You could not have had a more political President than Zail Singh, who reminded everyone that he was the one who had been dragged through the streets of Punjab, tied to a cart, because he had supported the integration of erstwhile PEPSU into the Indian republic. How could a mere stripling in politics tell him what to do? Rajiv Gandhi's government launched a less-than-secret 'curb the President democracy is in danger' programme in response.

Where does politics stop and the Constitution take over? It is hard to say. Take the current controversy between the Government of India and the President. When K.R. Narayanan was declared the presidential candidate, there was a muted protest within his own party, from a group of Dalits. Did that mean the Congress was opposed to his nomination on political grounds?

There are a whole lot of Cassandras who are bemoaning the collapse of the system, and the undermining of institutions by the BJP since it took office. They may be wrong, or may be right. But the fact is that the President's office is a political one—there's no getting around that fact. Denying this is only pretending politics doesn't exist. The question is how the government—and successive Presidents—have been able to manage the politics, handle the power, and uphold the prestige of the office. Here, neither the President nor the BJP government have covered themselves with glory.

The government was frankly unsure of the President's motives because of what had happened in the past.

This goes back to the time of the no-confidence motion. The PM and the President met soon after Jayalalitha pulled out of the Vajpayee government. The Prime Minister enquired if the President would want to order a no-confidence motion now that his government was in a minority. Or would a show of numbers do?

I don't think so, the President is believed to have responded. Just because one group has pulled out doesn't mean you need to go through a confidence motion. In any case, there is a Budget coming up.

The critics of the President in the government believe that it was the *rashtrapati* who advised the Opposition to go for the kill and bring the government down. They say they had information that the Congress changed its mind about a confidence motion soon after a meeting with the President. Also, a senior Congressman who later left the Congress had warned them that a confidence motion was going to come, so they had better place the Budget for passage in the first two or three days of the session.

How could he have known?

Rashtrapati Bhavan says conversation and correspondence between the PM and the President is privileged. So



Vajpayee with the Jawans: the government rejected the President's suggestion for a Rajya Sabha session on Kargil. It was unsure of Narayanan's motives

So Vajpayee went home sanguine in the belief that he would not have to undergo a test of confidence. So the government was shocked into silence when after this assurance Rashtrapati Bhavan sent them a letter informing them baldly that they should face a confidence vote. Obviously, the Opposition had got time to do its work. Later, when the government tried to understand why the President had changed his mind, the only conclusion they could reach was that the President had been worried about the financial chaos that would result if the Budget hadn't been passed. But the Congress had no intention of bringing the government down. This was one reason why Mulayam Singh Yadav was angry with Sonia Gandhi.

how come the newspapers get to hear of them?

The government says everyone has liabilities. Some ministers are ours. If the President exercises discretion so will we. But smoke leads to fire. And the Rashtrapati Bhavan's chimneys are terribly smoky.

Where is all this leading to? The President distrusts the BJP and allies and cannot rid himself of the feeling that they have an ulterior agenda. The government, not a very cohesive entity at the best of times, is defensive and aggressive in self defence. The point is that both have to make a fresh start. And it is the BJP and the allies which have more to lose if they don't. •

Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi

At The Cost Of

Kargil has revived two dormant issues: counter-insurgency (CIS) and defending LoC in Kargil. The first feeds on the second. The diversion of troops from the Valley to Kargil disturbed the CIS grid carefully set up over the last ten years, though the Rashtriya Rifles (RR) have filled some of the voids. Pakistan used Kargil as a diversion to pump in large number of Taliban into J&K.

The daring three-in-a-row attacks in two days in Kupwara sector last week are the fallout of the thinning out of troops from the Valley for Kargil. These attacks are unprecedented. For the first time, militants have dared to attack a regular army (RR post), a brigade headquarters and ambushed a Commanding

Officer's column killing him and his subedar major. It is also the first time after three to four years that militants have confronted the army instead of going for soft targets.

Previously militants had targeted army camps in Rajouri forcing the deployment of an additional division there last year. The militants have reorganised themselves with the majority of fighters being Afghan Taliban supported by local militants. They have revised their tactics: confrontations short of assaults on isolated posts instead of hit-and-run operations.

The message is clear. Pakistan will not allow the Kargil momentum to peter out, rather insurgency dormant in the Valley for a couple of years, will be rekindled and brought to full steam.

Pakistan has to focus international attention on the freedom fighters and the potential nuclear flashpoint of J&K.

This time around, Pakistan will engineer serious and spectacular incidents involving the local population which will deter the holding of elections in the state. The attacks on security forces in J&K in conjunction with the ISI-sponsored arson and insurgency in the north-east is likely to put the spotlight on deficiencies in internal security at the time of elections.

The victory in Kargil snatched from the jaws of defeat is both remarkable and a blessing in disguise. It has shown up operational deficiencies and preparedness in the armed forces, the fragility of

TALIBANS



Kargil

The new face of insurgency in the Valley

the LoC, the failure of early warning and the true face of Pakistan. It has equally vividly demonstrated the need for a war-like response including the use of air power to the new face of insurgency. It is also clear that constructive steps have to be concurrently taken in the political and diplomatic areas.

The immediate priorities are a vigorous CIS campaign and a sound plan for manning the liberated areas of Kargil. It would appear that RR along with BSF, CRPF and state police will be used to defeat the insurgency now that the army may be freed from this role. Whatever the composition of the force, a unified intelligence and operational command is a must for its success. Eventually RR should take over the responsibili-

ty of internal security tasks in J&K. A similar framework pivoted on Assam Rifles for the north-east is necessary. This is part of the old plan where DGs of Rashtriya and Assam Rifles would take over CIS duties from the army. The bulk of the insurgency in the Valley must be eliminated this winter without carrying over its traces into the new millennium.

The second problem is defending the LoC in Kargil. This task had been exaggerated to levels of fantasy by an uninformed media. Many breathtaking models have been suggested for defending Kargil. Pakistan is being credited with having Siachenised the entire mountain wasteland between Zojila and Turtuk tying down at least two, even three, divisions. These judgements betray incomplete knowledge of terrain, manning

norms and Siachen.

To start with, the politico-military connotation of Siachen on Kargil is misleading. Kargil lies within the territorial limits of the LoC whereas Siachen falls in its undemarcated zone. Three battalions deployed on the galcier along with the Saltoro watershed contest the disputed Pakistani interpretation of the extension of the LoC. The glaciated posts, east of Shyok River, are altitudes ranging from 18 to 20,000 feet, permanently snowbound.

In Kargil, each sector is different from the other. Mashkoh Valley, Dras, Kak-sar, Chhainikund, Singo, Batalik, Chorbatla and now the new Hanif (after Lt Hanifuddin) sub-sectors stretch across

INDIAN TROOPS IN SIACHEN



BRAVEHEARTS

From the diary of an LoC battalion in Kupwara

Kupwara like Sopore has always been the hotbed of insurgency in the Valley. Since last week, militants have raised the ante in their insurgency war in Kupwara. Here are extracts from a battalion's diary. Names have been changed for obvious reasons.

12 April: Death comes without warning. This time it has struck from space. Lightning struck the forward posts killing Naik Bishweshwar

Prasad and Rifleman Rajinder Singh. Twenty other soldiers received severe burns and some had to be evacuated by helicopter. Motivation and morale are so infectious that men were reluctant to vacate the post till they were forced to. One is lucky to have such troops in a unit.

26 April: With the melting of snow, the mercury has shot up due to heat or heavy artillery shelling the duels with the friends across. In the

evening, two snipers were killed in retaliation to enemy shelling. Interdicted of enemy troops continued with their greater intensity causing the shelling. Thereafter our soldiers had the best laugh.

18 May: Once again the enemy asked our patience. This time in broad daylight. They tried to move vehicles. Immediate heavy fire was brought on the target killing one officer and a soldier. This was later reported on PTV.

24 May: Our friends have variable stamina for punishment. Their guns were taken out by own missiles.

17 June: One more gun along with its crew was silenced.

26 June: Today is Remembrance Day. We salute all these heroes, sons and sons-in-law, whose dedication and sacrifice have secured us proud place in the Indian Army.

28 June: Heavy shelling continued in the sector. Nk Govind Pershad and Sep. Manoj Kumar were killed due to enemy shelling.

28 June: Rifleman Prakash Singh, a second generation soldier, son of a serving JCO, succumbed to injuries due to yesterday's shelling. We raise our hands to salute these martyrs. We were not demoralised. These tragic events have charged us further making resolve stiffer hard.

18 July: The Battalion has made humble contribution of Rs 50,000 for the Kargil War heroes. Another amount of Rs 50,000 has been sent to the next of kin of the two personnel killed on 28 June. We do have a generous heart, apart from the killer's intent. •



INDIAN SOLDIERS IN KUPWARA SECTOR

140 km averaging 14 to 16,000 feet. Before the Kargil War, four army and one BSF battalions occupied post throughout the year, but with wide gaps between brigades as well as between battalions. During summer, snow will thaw in most of these areas.

For example, the gaps between the

Siachen Brigade and Kargil (Batalik) and Kargil and Gurez Brigades (Mashkoh) were as large as 30 km. The inter-brigade boundaries are invariably the most vulnerable where encroachments and conflict usually start. These gaps have existed since 1972 because large-scale movement of troops in a war

situation was not envisaged.

Further, these areas in Ladakh were regarded as unsuitable for infiltration due to the Shia and Buddhist profile of population en route though some intruders were intercepted in Mashkoh in 1993. Most of the gaps, which have to be plugged are as different from Siachen as



INDIAN TROOPS IN KARGIL

Mount Kilimanjaro is from Kanchenjunga

Besides, the objectionable statement on Siachenisation the other illusion is about more Kargils. There is no scope for a Kargil elsewhere on the LoC. Templates suggested for intensified deployment to prevent recurrence of intrusions of Kargil are bizarre. They range from a post every 200 yards to 200 posts held by 20 men to a 1 to 3 model which implies three soldiers are required at the base to support one on the peak. This method followed at Siachen is irrelevant in Kargil. These absurd models have unnecessarily committed two to three divisions in Kargil replicating the three battalions on Siachen whereas the actual requirement is far less — no more than one brigade.

Surveillance and manning of the LoC is dictated by terrain, weather conditions and domination of LoC and routes across it. The new gridlock astride the LoC will not be encroachment proof. The most reliable early warning and surveillance systems are aerial and ground reconnaissance complemented by forward and sideways-looking radars, sensors but monitored by a man and a dog. Technology has to be tested on this terrain before induction.

Pakistan held the four pockets of intru-

The immediate priorities in J&K are a vigorous CIS campaign and a sound plan for manning the liberated areas of Kargil. Whatever the composition of the force, a unified intelligence and operational command is a must for its success

sions with 1,000 soldiers. They have brought in another brigade to hold posts opposite the area of intrusions. At the very most the Indian Army will require an additional 4,000 troops (one brigade) to plug the violated gaps. The existing brigade sector will turn into an expanded twin brigade divisional area, certainly not into a three division Corps Zone, however much Pakistan would want this to happen. At present Siachen, Turtuk

and Leh form part of the Leh division. Batalik and Chorbatla could be added to this as one additional brigade sector.

The cost of additional deployment by India will also have to be borne by Pakistan. It has already said it would man peaks on LoC from where it can dominate Kargil and has therefore inducted fresh troops for this. We need to raise additional battalions of J&K Light Infantry and Ladakh Scouts which have fought gallantly in Kargil and Turtuk. Their soldiers are locals, well-acclimatised and superbly motivated. The cost of defending Kargil has been erroneously estimated as Rs 4 crore a day. This has been compounded by mis-assessing the cost of Kargil as three times Siachen.

Sealing the LoC in high mountains is just not feasible. What is feasible is raising the cost for Pakistan breaching the LoC by strong and swift anti-infiltration and CIS operations. Also by making Pakistan pay diplomatic penalty. But the shelling in Kargil and Dras will go on. The trade off lies in the Neelam Valley and in the Kupwara sector where Indian guns keep doing a Kargil. That may be one reason why Kupwara has been chosen to launch the present phase of insurgency.

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

Most politicians are unwilling to contest the Lok Sabha polls

The Congress in Madhya Pradesh is a



Atal Behari Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi: finding it difficult to put up candidates

These men have said

For after the young MP from Kingston was given a coat, she said, thank you. But after all she didn't really want to connect. Pearl said that she had a problem with her back and that the doctors have advised her

in fact, says an MLA from Khajurao, "She has done only one job in her constituency and that is getting a ticket for her brother, who is now an MLA for the party." And Kushabhai Thakre's supporters insist that they have got fax messages from the local MLAs opposing Bharti's candidature from Khajurao. But then, considering Thakre and Bharti's far from cordial relationship, that is a story that should be taken with a fistful of salt.

SUNDAY 15—21 August 1990

prime example of state ministers not wanting to give up a cushy five-year tenure for an uncertain future at the Centre. Initially, the chief minister had promised the Centre that he would field his state ministers at the national level and suggested as many as seven state ministers for the Lok Sabha panel.

But most have refused. Take the case

of Srinivas Tewari, the two-term Vidhan Sabha Speaker. When Tewari came to know that his name was on the list, the shrewd Brahmin got himself admitted to the local Hamidia hospital. In fact, Tewari took no chances and went straight to the ICU ward, thus foiling the chief minister's plans of trying to get rid of him.

be worked out. Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party has still not come out with its first list citing seat-sharing problems as the reason.

The Congress also came out with its first list as late as the second week of August. (One reason for the delay is that it is scared that those who have been denied a ticket will cross over to Pawar's par-

Unlike the Congress, where the Arjun Singhs and Natwar Singhs have no higher moral reason to offer for opting out of electoral politics, the likes of the BJP's Sushma Swaraj can always cite organisational work as their reason for not contesting

Another reason for reluctance amongst the ticket-seekers is the delay in forming the alliances. With elections barely a month away, the seat-sharing ratio amongst most of the parties still has to

ty. And this is just one of the problems it's facing because of Pawar. The other is to find candidates who will take on the Maratha strongman in his constituency Baramati and the rest of the western Maharashtra.)

As for the BJP, it's still not too sure who its allies really are. George Fernandes says he's with the NDA, but he



SUSHMA SWARAJ: She said that she doesn't want to fight the elections because of 'personal reasons'. She is not lying. The personal reasons are of course that she has managed to antagonise many within the BJP itself — detractors like Madan Lal Khurana have let it be known that they will ensure that she loses — and personal ambition. Sushma knows that she has no future in any government headed by Atal Behari Vajpayee. So, she has now decided to concentrate on the organisation, where at least she has L.K. Advani's blessings.

SALMAN KHURSHID: He may be the UP PCC chief, he may even have managed to convince Sonia Gandhi that the flip show at Varanasi two



Sushma Swaraj

months ago was an organisational failure, rather than a comment on the Congress's popularity in the state. But, all this does not mean that he believes what he says. Khurshid has let it be known that he will not be contesting the Lok Sabha polls. Instead, his wife will stand from his constituency — Farrukhabad. That way, if he loses, he can always blame

it on her inexperience rather than his lack of popularity.

Y.S. RAJSEKHAR REDDY: His is probably the most honourable reason of them all. The Cudappah Tiger holds one of the safest Lok Sabha constituencies in the country — in fact he had even offered this to Sonia Gandhi if she wanted to contest from a sure seat. However, Reddy has said that he will not be fighting the Lok Sabha elections this time. Instead, he will contest from an MLA ticket.

L.K. GUJRAL: He has said he won't contest, but no one is quite sure whom the refusal is directed at: for no party is willing to back the former Prime Minister. During the last polls, he won from Jalandhar with the Akali Dal and the BJP's help. This time round, the SAD has already announced its candidate from Jalandhar — and it's not Gujral.

RELUCTANT CANDIDATES

For this round of polls

NATWAR SINGH: The Congress spokesperson is scared that the anti-Jat agitation against his party might rebound on him. Of course, this is not what he is saying in public. Like Uma Bharti, Singh has also cited health reasons for his reluctance to face the electorate. He says that he will contest, once his doctors give him a clean chit. Whatever that means.



Manmohan Singh

MANMOHAN SINGH: The Congress party's alternative candidate for prime ministership is not too keen to face the Lok Sabha polls as yet. However, his party wants him to contest the south Delhi seat as Singh has a large following amongst the middle class. The constituency also has a large number of Sikhs. Singh has finally agreed, but he is said to have put in a clause: he'll contest if the party denies a ticket to those involved in the 1984 riots such as Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar — as this will not go down well with the Sikhs in his constituency.

SUMITRA MAHAJAN: BJP general secretary and MP from Indore was reluctant to contest this time round. Unofficially, she cited factional politics as the reason, but on the record, she took the Sushma Swaraj line and said that she would rather dedicate herself to 'organisational' work. But she doesn't have Swaraj's clout and so was overruled and asked to contest. So, poor Mahajan has once again to face a constituency that sent her to Parliament in 1998 with a margin of a mere 6 per cent.

BANGARU LAXMAN: The poor man is from Andhra. But, he's been given a ticket from Jalore in Rajasthan. During the BJP election committee meeting, the party was looking for a leader to take on Buta Singh. It was pointed out that Singh was an outsider, so maybe another 'outsider' should be pitted against him — and then Laxman's detractors chortled and suggested his name. There is little that Laxman could do except agree to contest from a constituency from the Hindi-heartland without being too fluent in the language. He, however, has put in a rider: will contest from Jalore, only if Buta Singh stands. After all, the party was looking for an opposition to Singh rather than a candidate from Jalore when they suggested his name.

MARGARET ALVA: She was reportedly keen to contest the Assembly elections since she had set her eyes on being the Congress chief ministerial candidate from Karnataka. But, amidst speculation, Alva has issued a clarification that she will be contesting the Lok Sabha from the Kanara parliamentary seat. (In the 1998 polls, she lost the seat to the BJP's Ananth Kumar by a margin of nearly 12 per cent.) •



Sharad Pawar: posing a threat to the Congress

wants to bring in a whole lot of excess baggage that the BJP doesn't really want. And when the seat-sharing ratio still has to be worked out, how are the parties expected to come out with the list of candidates?

And if it's not the formation of new alliances, it's the decimation of old ones that is causing the problem.

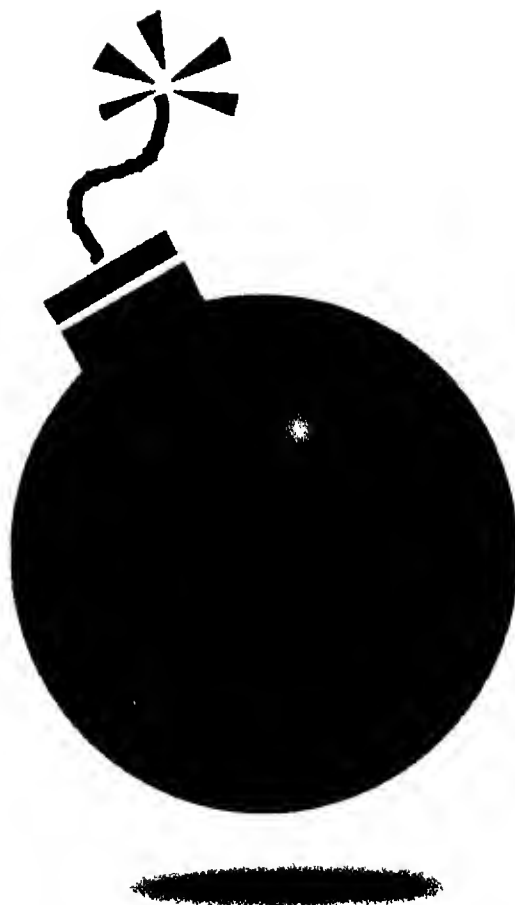
For instance, in Andhra Pradesh, with the dissolution of the Third Front and the Congress on a winning streak, the Left and the erstwhile Janata Dal are having a hard time trying to finalise its list of candidates.

Things are no different in Karnataka. From the Congress, both Veerappa Moily and B. Janardhan Poojary have asked for a specific constituency. They let it be known that if they won't get the constituency of their choice, they were not interested in contesting. And, due to shortage of candidates, both have got away with this. Moily has been given Mangalore (he fought from Chikmagalur last time) and Poojary who lost from Mangalore the last two times, will now contest from Udipi.

Unlike the Congress, where the Arjun Singhs and Natwar Singhs have no higher moral reason to offer for opting out of electoral politics, the likes of the BJP's Sushma Swaraj can always cite organisational work as their reason for not contesting. And this is something that will score points with the *sangh parivar* which is already bemoaning its loss of ideology at the altar of Cabinet portfolios.

But whatever the reason, the result is the same: there are just no takers for Lok Sabha, 1999. •

**Anuja Joshi/Bangalore,
Deshdeep Saxena/Bhopal and
Priya Sahgal/New Delhi**



**FROM 1ST JANUARY, 2000,
SOMETHING IN YOUR OFFICE WILL START
SABOTAGING YOUR BUSINESS.**

If your business uses computers or microchip-based machines, you could be affected by the Y2K bug. Act now to ensure that your business isn't disrupted. Remember this is the one deadline you cannot afford to miss. Read on to find out where to get help.

Many voices

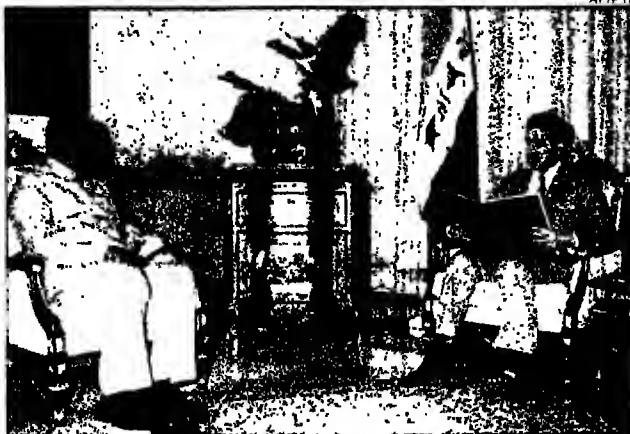
It seems every minister takes foreign policy for granted



If proof were needed that the Indian government, whatever its political hue, possesses nothing like a collective consciousness of foreign policy imperatives, it has been provided by the rather flashy petroleum minister, V.K. Ramamurthy. On a visit to Baghdad, he blandly announced that India wanted to extend to Saddam Hussein's Iraq a US

\$25 million credit. The amount is small but its symbolic value is nothing short of dramatic.

Under the UN Security Council resolutions passed at the time of the Gulf war to which India was a party, Iraq is under tight sanctions. Any succour to the Saddam regime is taboo. In any case, though the minister had no authority to make such



Petroleum minister V.K. Ramamurthy, on a visit to Baghdad, blandly announced that India wanted to extend to Saddam Hussein's Iraq a US \$25 million credit

a statement, he thought that an official foreign tour was no different from a visit to his constituency.

Ramamurthy's ignorance of the enormity of his faux pas is astounding. At a time when there is a virtual honeymoon between the Vajpayee government and the Clinton administration, the petroleum minister said something which was bound to infuriate the Americans who are not prepared to countenance any quarter being shown to Saddam by anyone.

No wonder the foreign office immediately repudiated the minister's remarks. The New Delhi statement reaffirmed India's adherence to the UN sanctions against Iraq. It added, however, that any credit to Baghdad — under the UN's own "oil for food and medicines" scheme — might be offered only

after seeking the world body's permission.

However, it will be unfair to blame Ramamurthy alone for talking loosely on sensitive foreign policy issues without seeking the permission of the Prime Minister, if not of the Cabinet. Other ministers have done worse without the PM or anyone else being able to say boo to them.

The classic case is that of the defence minister, George Fernandes, and this has nothing to do with his absurd statements exonerating Nawaz Sharif and the ISI of the crime of invading Kargil — which have been refuted not only by the Pakistani Army chief, General Pervez Musharraf, but also by every authoritative Pak mediaperson. Under discussion here are George's wild statements against China long before the Pokhran-II nuclear tests and China's overreaction to them.

When the Prime Minister himself wrote to Clinton that the Chinese threat was the main cause of the tests, the Chinese could not be blamed for thinking that Fernandes was building up public opinion to justify the tests on account of the "threat" from China. The fact, however, is that the defence minister was told of the impending tests rather late.

As if this was not enough, the then urban development minister, Ram Jethmalani, muddled waters further by making irresponsible pronouncements on Tibet and Taiwan, which were bound to annoy Beijing. Once again no one seemed to discipline him.

One must hasten to add that what is going on, in relation to foreign policy and its implementation, is of a piece with a pattern established long ago. It is impossible to think of any individual whose control on any country's foreign policy was so complete as that of Jawaharlal Nehru. Even during his heyday, however, various ministers and ministries pursued their own foreign policies, but with one crucial difference. Everyone deferred to the titanic leader and backtracked if he saw a frown on the great man's face.

By the mid-Fifties, when India faced an acute foreign exchange shortage and huge foreign aid became the need of the hour, economic diplomacy was taken over almost completely by the finance ministry. Then, during the Shastri era and the first few years of Indira Gandhi, the food ministry took over from finance because now an enormous quantity of concessional wheat imports from the US was required.

Even today, mid-level officials of the ministries of commerce, water resources, home, economic affairs and so on can merely subvert policies of the external affairs ministry. Especially where trade, travel and other relations with immediate neighbours are concerned. And, as I have remarked in this column more than once that one gift of globalisation is the widening gulf between the North and South Block. This indeed is the greatest North-South divide.

Finally, there is the mother of all infirmities from which the foreign office suffers. Over long years and under successive Prime Ministers, the PMO has marginalised the external affairs ministry to the point of emasculating it.



**YOU HAVE FIVE MONTHS TO SAVE YOUR BUSINESS.
YOUR CLOCK STARTS NOW.**

The deadline for fixing the Y2K bug is absolutely immovable. It could be somewhere in your systems or those of your associates. The problem isn't difficult to solve - it takes time and the commitment of senior management. And of course, the longer you put it off, the more expensive it will get. Your business is at stake. Read on to find out what you need to do right away

Lintas Y2K TSR2 Sdv



The Y2K bug is not a computer problem. It's a business problem. It can affect any computer, communication network or device that runs on microchips, seriously disrupting their functions. It is not restricted to large organisations, government and heavily computerised countries. It is your problem, because your business is at

computers and microchips will recognise '00' as the year '1900' and not '2000'. Faced with a situation they cannot comprehend, they will 'panic' – and either shut down or generate incorrect data, disrupting business in many ways.

Is it hard to fix ?

Not really. In computers, the problem exists



The bad news about Y2K: it can affect your business.

The good news: if you act now, it won't.

stake. And unlike any other problem, it has an unchangeable deadline for action - December 31, 1999. So investing a little time on it could well be the wisest business decision you have ever made.

What is the Y2K bug ?

As a shortcut, programmers decided to use two digits to record the year in computers and microchips. For example, the year '1999' would be recorded as '99'. This practice continued until very recently. On January 1st, 2000, however, these



at five levels - hardware, operating system, software programmes, data and data sharing. Check how dates are used at these levels in your business, and you will get an idea of the task. Fixing Y2K is really a management issue. Invest some time and senior management commitment in drawing up and implementing a checklist of processes.

Even if you don't own computers, you could be affected.

Think. Do you deal with trading partners or customers who depend on



'I'm convinced Y2K will affect my business. Send me the 'Y2K OK' infopack at once.' (Fill in capitals)

Name _____ Designation _____

Company Name _____

Address _____ City _____

PIN _____ Phone _____ E-Mail _____

1 Type of Industry _____ 2 Type of organisation (✓): ☐ PSU ☐ Government ☐ Self Employed ☐ Pvt Sector

3 Turnover of company _____ 4 No. of computers _____

Mail to **Solutions Integrated Marketing Services, P.O. Box No. 4481, Kalkaji, New Delhi-110019.**

computers? If their systems are not Y2K OK, your raw materials supply and payments could be affected. It is in your best interest to talk to them and ensure their compliance. Do you have embedded chips in your business processes? These programmable devices control a variety of equipment and can be difficult to detect, test and rectify. In this case, carefully prioritise (based on assessment of impact) and seek help from vendors or the services of a consultant.

What are the financial and legal implications?

The Y2K bug will affect all date-dependent processes – including invoicing, payments, production planning, databases, accounting, budgeting, payroll systems and date-dependent production facilities or building infrastructure. The first direct impact will be on cashflow. That's not all. Your Y2K status has to be reported quarterly and in annual reports as per SEBI guidelines. A Y2K OK certification is crucial for investor confidence. If you head a publicly-quoted company or rely heavily on exports, the implications are grave. Most countries have already stopped dealing with non-Y2K OK companies. Also, if your customers or employees suffer any losses due to lack of Y2K compliance you will be liable for legal action.



How do I find out if I have the Y2K bug?

Test all levels of operations of your computers and microchip-based systems. While the basic hardware test can be done within half an hour, other levels will require expert supervision. Even if you have an IT manager, call an outside agency for an impartial view.

I think I have the Y2K bug. What do I do now?

Follow these steps in partnership with your Y2K consultant:

- Make an inventory of all date-dependent systems.
- Assess impact on critical areas.
- Repair, retire, replace or retain as the case may be.
- Test and install to ensure systems are Y2K OK.
- Undertake contingency planning: never assume that the bug has been completely eradicated. Keep data backups and make alternative plans for all core business functions.
- Check new purchases and insist on Y2K OK certificates from every supplier.

Good news at last – how becoming Y2K OK can benefit your business.

Think of your Y2K OK project as spring-cleaning. An opportunity to evaluate and overhaul your company's

infotech systems (tax benefits are available for this). This will lead to a better networked and more efficient organisation. One that customers looking for the reassurance of dealing with companies that are Y2K OK would love to deal with. It is an invaluable opportunity to cement existing relationships and develop new ones.

Where do I get help?

CMC (supported by Deptt. of Electronics, Govt. of India) has set up helpdesks in all major cities. Call them at (040) 3000409 / 3001682, or fax at (040) 3001683 / 3000167. Of course, you can always reach out to the DoE website: www.y2k.gov.in, or e-mail them at: help@y2k.gov.in. If you wish to receive a free Y2K infopack, just fill out the coupon below. Make sure you have all the ammunition to tackle this enemy. And wish your business a happy new year.



Y2K at a Glance

- The Y2K bug can cause serious business disruptions.
- Even if you don't use computers or microchip-based systems, Y2K problems at your suppliers, customers or utilities can affect you.
- The bug isn't hard to fix – all it takes is time and some management commitment.
- Failure to get Y2K OK can lead to loss of data, cash-flow problems, loss of investor confidence and legal action.
- The tests for the bug are simple, but must be carried out at all levels of date-dependent computer and microchip-based operations.
- Inventory, Assess, Repair, Retire, Replace or Retain, Test and Install, and have a Contingency Plan.
- You can use Y2K to revamp your business & build new business.
- There are several reliable sources of help.



LET'S MAKE INDIA Y2K OK.



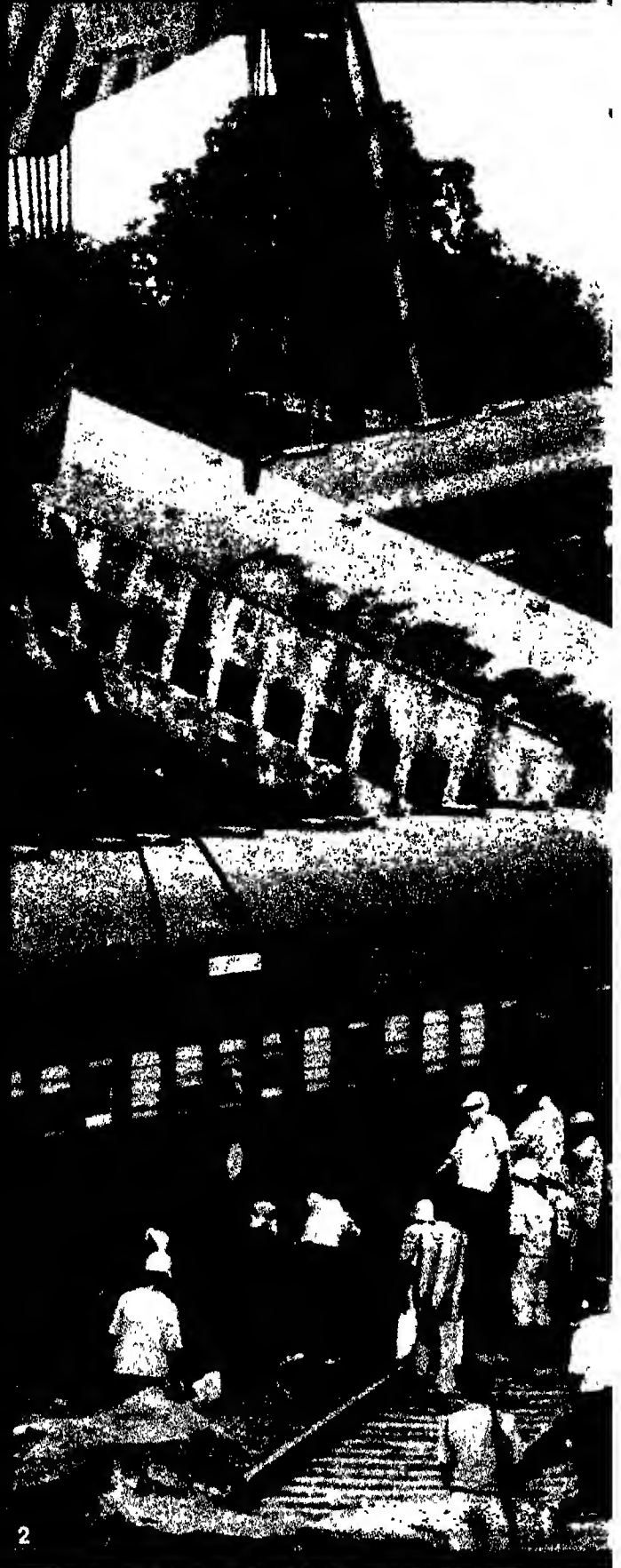
DEATH TRAIL

The tragedy at Gaisal

Gaisal was just another sleepy hamlet in north Bengal. Till the night of 1 August. The night when the Up Awadh-Assam Express and Down Brahmaputra Mail hurtled through the darkness — towards each other.

At 1.56 am, 2 August, while thousands of passengers slept, the two trains crashed headlong into each other, at Gaisal. Within moments, 13 bogies of the speeding trains had been reduced to a bundle of burnt, mangled metal.

By daybreak, all hell had broken loose over Gaisal. An overwhelming stench of rotting flesh and



1. THE TOLL MOUNTS: A body being extricated from the wreckage. As rescue workers pried open more and more compartments, the horror hit home

2. COLLISION COURSE: Was it a case of systems failure? Or was it some careless cabinman who pulled the wrong lever?





3. **TORN AND TWISTED:**
As salvage operations
got underway, an
overwhelming stench
of rotting flesh and
bleaching powder hung
heavy over the disaster
site

4. **MEN IN BLUE:** IAF
personnel carrying
away a colleague. Far
from the battle front,
the *faujis* rallied
together in this hour of
grief





5. PICKING UP THE PIECES: Armymen searching for their comrades and their belongings. Many aboard the Brahmaputra Mail were going to Gwalior to join their unit

6. THE SURVIVORS: The ones who miraculously escaped were found sitting on the tracks, numb with shock. Some were waiting for news of their loved ones, others for their possessions

bleaching powder hung heavy over the disaster site. As did a pall of gloom.

Rescue workers — their senses numbed out with an overdose of *chulla* — went about their task mechanically, with a glazed look in their eyes. They ducked under ravaged compartments, pried open by gas-cutters, to emerge with yet another horribly mangled body.

Even as the bodies piled up, just a few paces away, *gariwallahs* and *chaiwallahs* were busy cashing in on the catastrophe. People from nearby localities had landed up in hired cars, just to have a *dekho*.

Tragedy, you realise, is a top draw — from a safe distance.

But who were the people who died? The nameless, faceless ones? Who knows? Who cares?

You turn away from the site and get back to the business of living. •

Photographs: Pradip Sanyal
Text: Sourabh Sen/Gaisai

By God's Grace

PRADIP SANYAL



Postulator Father Brian

The canonisation process of Mother Teresa begins

In the Middle Ages, there was a Latin saying in the Churchdom: *Vox Populi, Vox Dei* (The voice of the people is the voice of God). Centuries later, the same holds true. Under intense pressure and lobbying from the clergy and ordinary people from all over, the Vatican has been compelled to bend its age-old rule of the five-year wait-period before a canonisation process is allowed to start. Last fortnight, this happened in Calcutta as the people witnessed the beginning of the sainthood process of Mother Teresa of the Missionaries of Charity (MC).

On the morning of 28 July, the hymns of *Veni Sancte Spiritus* reverberated inside the St. Mary's Church on Ripon Street, Calcutta. It was a solemn gathering comprising priests and the nuns of Missionaries of Charity. Inside the church, holy sermons were preached and hymns sung for the Mother. And in a simple ceremony, the diocesan enquiry into the life, virtues and reputation of sanctity of the Servant of God, Mother Teresa, was set into motion.

In the ceremony, the diocesan enquiry team — which comprises members of the Tribunal (a Promoter of Justice, Episcopal delegate and Notary), Historical Commission, Theological Commission and the Postulator for the Cause — was administered oath of office, secrecy and the Church by the Archbishop of Calcutta, Rev. Henry D'Souza. "Ten to twelve persons were appointed for this Cause. They were nominated by me in consultation with Sister Nirmala, the Superior-General of MC," said Rev. D'Souza.

The day was very special for the nuns of the MC. Ever since Mother Teresa's death on 5 September 1997, they had been praying for a divine intervention so that the Holy See would dispense with the five-year waiting period and start the canonisation process. "This is the first time such an exemption has been granted in Christian history. In fact, requests were made to the Calcutta Diocese and the Vatican from New York, London, San Diego, etc., to start the sainthood process," said Vicar General Monsignor Francis Gomes.

As early as April 1998, Archbishop Henry D'Souza had gone to Rome to request the Vatican to exempt the five-year waiting period. But the Congregation for the Causes of Saints



HOLY COMMUNION: Mother Teresa with Pope John Paul II



politely refused. "In the meantime, Mother Teresa's reputation of sanctity increased in extent and intensity, both within and outside the Church. Moreover, there were numerous reports of favours granted through Mother's intercession. And some even reported miracles," said Father Brian Kolodiejchuk, the Postulator for the Cause.

On 12 December, 1998, the Vatican finally agreed. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints despatched to the Archbishop of Calcutta the 'Rescript of Dispensation' from the requirement of waiting period of five years before initiating the Cause of beatification and canonisation of Mother Teresa.

Later, Archbishop Jose Saraiva Martins, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, in an interview with the Vatican Radio, explaining the dispensation said: "...the avalanche of petitions which have come from varied sources in the Catholic Church, as well as groups and individuals or institutions which are not part of the church." He also referred to the extraordinary ecclesiastical relevance which is invested in the figure of the "foundress of the MC" that made the Vatican change its mind.

Immediately after receiving the Rescript, the Archbishop

In the Middle Ages, there was a Latin saying in the Churchdom: *Vox Populi, Vox Dei* (The voice of the people is the voice of God). Centuries later, the same holds true for Mother Teresa. Under intense pressure and lobbying from the clergy and ordinary people, the Vatican has been compelled to start Mother's sainthood process

of Calcutta Diocese sought *Nihil Obstat*, a formal permission or a no-objection certificate, from the Vatican to start Mother's sainthood process. Once it was granted, Postulator Father Brian got down to prepare the MC's formal petition. Meanwhile, the officials for the diocese-level enquiry were appointed. On 11 June, 1999, Father Brian presented his petition to Archbishop D'Souza. The next day, a decree was passed by Rev. D'Souza indicating his assent to initiate the Cause of the Mother.

"Subsequently, we had to get everything in order to carry out the enquiry. The list of witnesses were prepared and the officials made ready to start the enquiry. Since Mother travelled all over the world and had a wide following, arrangements were also made to hold sessions in Rome, New York, London, San Diego and Philippines for the convenience of testimony by witnesses," said Father Brian. "Those who are ill and old are being tried by the Tribunal first and then the rest will follow."

So far, a list of 100 witnesses have been prepared by the Postulator. Of which more than 50 are said to be from India and the rest spread all over the world. An office has been set up for the Cause at the Archbishop's House in Calcutta, where witnesses are giving testimony every day — five days a week. "One witness is giving testimony every day and the enquiry is held in two sessions of three hours each," revealed Rev. D'Souza.

"Oh! The Archbishop of Mother Teresa..."

Rev. Henry D'Souza on Mother and her sainthood

SUNDAY: Your diocese is now a part of the Christian history as it's making an enquiry into Mother Teresa's sainthood. How do you feel about it?

Rev. Henry D'Souza: Well, for a long time, Calcutta has been in the world map because of Mother Teresa. When Mother Teresa was alive, whenever I mentioned to someone that I was the Archbishop of Calcutta, they immediately said, 'Oh! The Archbishop of Mother Teresa'. Mother has been a part of diocese's history over 25 years. The diocese has hit the headlines several times because of her. And, over the years, it received importance from all over the world because of Mother Teresa. For sainthood, too, the same consideration is being given to us. And it's a great privilege for me to be the Archbishop of Calcutta and to start the Cause.

Q: You knew Mother Teresa very well.

A: Mother always came across as a person of great compassion. A person who had a great love for people, particularly for those who were suffering. She was a very positive person who had simple answers to difficult problems. She never got discouraged by any problem. She believed in the philosophy of better to light the candle than to curse the darkness.

Q: Do you think Mother Teresa is an ideal candidate for sainthood?

A: Mother Teresa fulfils all the conditions required for sainthood. For example, one would have had to live a holy life. Everybody knows that she lived only for God and for His service. Her life, her behaviour, her decisions all seem to endorse the fact that she lived a very holy life.

Q: How many persons did you appoint for the enquiry?

A: Ten to twelve persons have been appointed for this process. The key persons are: the episcopal delegate, Bishop Salvador Lobo of Barurpur Diocese in West Bengal, who is hearing evidence on my behalf. The Promoter of Justice, Father Hrosocio, an Italian priest and missionary who is living in Calcutta for the last 50 years. The Notary, Sister Rebeiro, a Loreto nun, who is recording the enquiry. Moreover, there are priests who are serving in the Historical Commission and Theological Commission.



Archbishop Henry D'Souza

Q: What is your role in the canonisation process?

A: I had to begin the process because she died here and belonged to Calcutta. In fact, as the Archbishop of Calcutta my role in this process is quite vital. I appointed all the members of the Tribunal and other officials. They have to report to me about the enquiry. And the petition that will finally go to the Vatican would require my approval.

Q: Are the present laws of canonisation different from the ancient ones?

A: The present ones are much more detailed. In the 12th and 13th centuries, canonisation was done through acclaim. But since 1983, the new procedure of sainthood was laid down, now we're following that. It is much more comprehensive, detailed and scientific. This process wants to ensure whatever is done can stand the test of objectivity.

Q: How many witnesses are being interviewed everyday?

A: Only one person at a time. And it lasts almost a whole day. The session goes on for hours. Some witnesses on account of their illness have been taken beforehand. For instance, the evidence of Father Le Joli of St. Xavier's and Father Cukale were taken in their own rooms. Both are missionaries who lived in India for more than 50 years and knew Mother Teresa well.

As for the others, they are coming over to the Archbishop House to give witness for the Cause. The main idea is to collect as much evidence as possible of Mother Teresa's Holiness so that the final report is objective, scientific and thorough.

Q: Is the process being conducted very fast?

A: I believe it will take at least a year to collect all the evidence in Calcutta, Rome, New York and other places. And then a summary report will be presented to the Holy See for acceptance. Yes, things are going fast and Mother has surpassed all by getting an exemption of five years from the Holy See to start her Cause.

Q: Will Christianity benefit by making her a saint?

A: Mother Teresa was a faithful follower of the Church and very loyal to the Church laws. She reflected all Christian virtues in her lifetime. She was a living example to all Christians. She made people believe that everybody in the society could contribute in their small and humble way and in the process serve people and God. Definitely, she is a role model for sainthood. •

The enquiry aims to know as much as possible about Mother Teresa's life, virtues, reputation of holiness, fortitude, justice, temperance, faith, prudence and miracles caused through her intercession. The Tribunal will hear cases of favours granted to individuals who prayed to Mother Teresa for intercession. And all the reports of miracles caused by Mother's intercession will be scrutinised and the medical reports would be attached to the documents being prepared for the Cause. "While the Tribunal will ensure that all the testimonies are fool-proof and medical certificates are in place, the Historical Commission will record her entire life to prove her holiness," explained Father Brian.

When will this phase end? That's very difficult to say. The way things are going, Church sources disclose, the enquiry at the local diocese is expected to be over by November 1999. Once completed, the documents will be bound in volumes made before the Postulator presents them to the Saint-Makers at Vatican. In fact, not only is the enquiry tedious, but also the final document very voluminous.

Take the case of Padre Pio, an Italian Franciscan priest, who died in 1968 and was beatified on 2 May, 1999, the fastest in recent times. His sainthood enquiry was conducted in Spain. His final enquiry report, that recorded 69 witnesses, comprised 104 volumes. And each volume having 400 pages.

Mother Teresa's report will account for 100 witnesses.

In the past, the road to sainthood has been long and tedious. It took all of 600 years to canonise Joan of Arc. And before Padre Pio, the fastest-recorded instance was that of Maximilian Kolbe — 40 years — who gave his life for a fellow Pole at Auschwitz. Originally, four miracles had to be attributed to a person for canonisation. But that changed under the new law promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1983.

According to the new law, only one miracle is required for the half-way stage of beatification and another one for canonisation, instead of the previous two for each stage. "Some miracles have been attributed to Mother Teresa in West Bengal, Maharashtra and Goa. These people have apparently been cured of terminal illness. Of course, it has to be verified," revealed Father Brian. "Verifying the miracles is the most difficult part. Because these are inexplicable by science. The cases have to be cross-examined and verified by doctors and by the office of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints and the Promoter of Justice."

The Promoter of Justice, used to be called the Devil's Advocate (now called a Relator), occupies an office of the Saint-Makers in Rome. The Postulator presents the enquiry to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints which sits in a modern building at the top of Via della Conciliazione, close to St. Peter's Cathedral, Rome. Here, the Promoter of Justice along with other Vatican bishops investigate every detail of the document before vetting it. This is a crucial phase. The Devil's Advocate is the Vatican's theological censor. His job is to find out the negatives in a candidate's CV and argue against canonisation.

Once he is agreeable, the report has to be vetted by a panel of nine cardinals and bishops. "At least, six of them have to vote in favour of the candidate before it is accepted," pointed out Father Brian. Then the case is presented to the Pope. And once the Holy See is convinced, the process is over and the person is canonised. "The Pope consults the Congregation for the Causes of Saints before passing a judgement. He is the final judge," said Rev. D'Souza.



THE ALBANIAN ROSE: Mother with the sisters of MC

How good are the chances of Mother Teresa being canonised? Very good. First, the euphoria and support for her Cause come not only from the clergy but also the common people. Secondly, and more importantly, Mother was very close to Pope John Paul II. He is said to be taking a personal interest in her case.

What's more, the Vatican records show that this Pope has canonised more saints than his predecessors in Rome. Since 1978, there have been 278 new saints and 769 beatifications. And there are more than 2,000 cases still pending with the Saint-Makers in Vatican. "The present Pope believes that all Christians are Cause to holiness. When he decides to beatify and canonise a candidate, his aim is to present the person as an example of Christian life. This Pope is aware of Mother's qualities and the fact that she transformed many non-practising Christians to fervent believers. All these will go in Mother's favour," thinks Father Brian.

The Church also believes in the concept of "pastoral relevance of a candidate" put up for canonisation. The Vatican believes there should be ample justification for presenting a person at that particular time. Mother Teresa definitely fits the bill: she led a "heroically virtuous life" and was seen as a "shining example" who inspired Christians. Most believe, Mother Teresa is a role model for sainthood. She had a great following during her lifetime and retains them even after her death.

And this alone could tilt the Vatican's decision in her favour, soon. •

Arindam Sarkar/Calcutta

Shekhar Kapur is all stirred up. His *Elizabeth*, the story of England's most famous queen, which has grossed a 100 million dollars worldwide and shaken up the stodgy keepers of British history, has been refused clearance by the Indian Censor Board. As a result, the much-publicised screening for an invited audience at Siri Fort was cancelled.

The censors, in the shape of Asha Parekh, are sticking to the three cuts they have asked for. A French duke humiliates a young, inexperienced Elizabeth in front of her court by saying he would like to make love to her and touch her 'quinty'. According to Parekh, "That means the queen's private part, doesn't it? It doesn't sound nice."

The others are: a flash of breast-and-buttocks which the censors want 'pruned', and a scene where three beheaded characters are seen to be impaled for public viewing, which they find too gory.

Kapur is out of patience with such arbitrary prudery. He is also incensed at Parekh's implication in an interview that he is making public fuss only to 'garner publicity'. All through his stay in the capital last week, when he and the film's distributors met with the President to plead their case, he spoke to the media, the chattering set, and anyone else who'd listen, repeating the same thing. I will not accept the cuts. It shows a complete lack of respect for film-makers who are dedicated to their craft. Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* was shown without any cuts, because his distributors had been told that it would have to be screened in its entirety or not at all. I am asking the same thing for *Elizabeth*.

For Spielberg, India may have been



Kapur with Joseph Fiennes at the 4 August press conference in Delhi

No SHOW

just another Asian market. For Kapur, it's an emotive issue. This is home. It is in the teeming chaotic world of Bollywood that he cut his teeth, learnt what it was like to deal with 'story-sittings, actors and egos'. It is to Bombay he comes when he needs to put himself together again, after the gruelling rigours of

Shekhar Kapur's Elizabeth runs into trouble with the Indian Censor Board

shoots in parts abroad, and there's every indication that he will be spending more and more of his time out of the country with his current projects — a biopic on Nelson Mandela and a collaboration with composer Andrew Lloyd Webber on a reworking of *Phantom Of The Opera*.

"I find it demeaning to be told that we've passed most of your film," he told SUNDAY. "It's like being told that we've cut off one finger but you have the rest of your hand. I've always fought, fought, fought for the right to say things my way, and I'm going to stay with it."

Digging in his heels is something that Kapur has always done with relish. Right from the time he left a lucrative career in accountancy in the UK, and came back to Bombay to be in movies, and graduated to his first directorial venture after some years of no-account parts, he has had the reputation of 'being difficult'. But that didn't stop his films from becoming hot talking points. *Musoom*, all about a man discovering he has a child from a previous relationship and how his wife and two legitimate children react to the outsider, was a big hit. He discovered dizzying success with *Mr India*, a comic adventure with Sridevi, Anil Kapoor and a bunch of kids pitted against the villainous Moganbo.

In between, the director started high-profile projects and walked out of them, one when the film was halfway done, others when they were ready to hit the floors. He became Bollywood's *enfant terrible*. As Mahesh Bhatt, another celebrated director who doesn't pull his punches, put it at a Delhi do to felicitate 'his friend Shekhar', those who try ploughing their furrow in Bombay movies, soon have to do it outside.

With his next, *Bandit Queen*, Kapur did exactly that. His money came from

Channel 4, the producers and his cast from the cream of Delhi's stage actors — Seema Biswas, Manoj Bajpai, Govind Namdeo — and it was shot on real locations in the Chambal ravines, and bypassed Bombay. It was with *Bandit Queen* that his brush with the censors began; the film was full of invectives, brutal killing and multiple rapes, and worse, it claimed to be based on a true story.

Kapur stood by everything he had done. The language that people used in the era was peppered with abuse, and the only way he could prove that Phoolan Devi, the *Chambal ki Rani*, was a woman more sinned against than sinning, was to show the violence wreaked upon her. It looked to be a stalemate till ABCL, the all-India distributors, got the film a passage through the Tribunal, and

wood on a prospecting tour and the feelers he sent came back with a thumping reward, *Elizabeth*. In a long chat with SUNDAY six months ago, immediately after his film opened the International Film Festival in Hyderabad, Kapur had said, "It was unbelievable. Here was this completely English story being planned with an Australian actress [Cate Blanchett], American crew and an Indian director, and the fact that we pulled it off."

At that time, many prominent British critics were venting their ire about an 'outsider's' take on their most renowned queen which dared suggest, nay, even show that she wasn't a virgin. They damned it with laint praise, saying that it was colourful and fast-paced, the way Bombay melodramas were, but that it was inauthentic and inaccurate.

last week because of her 'bad back', but co-star Joseph Fiennes who did, was unstinting in his praise for Kapur. When asked by SUNDAY whether he had reservations about an Indian being let loose on a slice of English history, he said, "Shekhar's approach was refreshing because it was more objective, and he came closer to the truth through imagination. As a director, he is collaborative and his biggest quality is that he listens."

As things stand at the moment, Kapur and his distributors are in for the long haul. Their appeal against the censor's decision is up for hearing with the Tribunal; meanwhile, even if the director is vehement about not orchestrating the splash of publicity, *Elizabeth* has become the fashionable thing to discuss at high-power cocktail soirees.

And it looks as if his attempt at gett-



As things stand now, Kapur and his distributors are in for the long haul. Their appeal against the censor's decision is up for hearing with the Tribunal. Meanwhile, *Elizabeth* has become the fashionable thing to discuss at high-power cocktail soirees

finally the film was screened with some cuts.

Bandit Queen sec-sawed through Indian theatres weathering a high court order on the petition filed by Phoolan Devi (the film, she said, did not do justice to her life, and many things in it, including the notorious Behmai massacre, never happened). It may have had a choppy afterlife in India, but it made Kapur's reputation in the international film marts, especially when it had the hard-to-please critics in Cannes raving.

The response in foreign festivals encouraged Kapur to go off to Holly-

Kapur threw off this criticism with commendable insouciance. "I am not saying that I reinvented history. I'm just trying to give it a new interpretation. I'm trying to discover what this woman was really like." So he gives us an Elizabeth before she comes to the throne, and in Cate Blanchett's playing of her, we have a stunning combination of an illegitimate royal maiden who is dubbed a 'pretender', a vulnerable young woman who is generous in love and a ruthless ambitious queen who has no hesitation in cutting off those heads which would not bow to her.

Blanchett could not come to Delhi

ing a satisfactory script for Mandela is proving tough. He was unhappy with the first script because it didn't give him a hold on the most famous South African, the way his understanding of Indira Gandhi's initial years spent negotiating the corridors of power, gave him an insight into the youthful Elizabeth. On a talk show last weekend, he blurted out that it was an incomplete 'white man's view', and then stopped short saying he had better not go on.

Knowing Kapur's penchant for attracting trouble by sticking to his stand, we know he will. •

Shubhra Gupta/New Delhi



Marriage certainly seems to suit Kajol. Ever since she settled down in wedded bliss with Ajay Devgan, she's happily piling on the pounds. So now, she

looks like nothing more than the contented housewife that she is.

Does this mean that we can rule out all hopes of a Kajol comeback? Or is she planning to play *bhabhi* and mother roles during her second innings?



Whatever else you may say about Mohammad Azharuddin — and everyone from Kapil Dev to Bishen Singh Bedi has a lot to say

about him — you have to admit that his heart is in the right place.

So unlike most other celebrities, and such filmstars as Shah Rukh Khan whose purse strings remained tightly in place, Azhar made a more than generous personal (and that's the key word: personal) contribution to the Kargil fund. The former Indian skipper handed over a cheque worth Rs 5 lakh to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at the latter's residence.

Given that Azhar's personal wealth is only a fraction of the fortunes stashed away by either Shah Rukh or even Govinda, you have to admire Azhar's generosity. Perhaps our faux heroes could learn a lesson from this. Or is that hoping for too much?

Star mama Babita strikes again. This time the target of her wrath is Vikram Phadnis, a dress designer. The hapless Vikram was taken along to a Switzerland shoot by Babita so that he could get Kareena's wardrobe together. But when this Good Samaritan decided to help the other heroine of the film, Bipasha Basu, with her clothes, all hell broke loose.

Vikram was sent back home on the next flight by an



incensed Babita and poor little Kareena had to manage her clothes herself — with some help from Ma Babs, of course.

Bipasha Basu is turning out to be the new femme fatale of the film industry — Dino Morea or no Dino Morea.

First, it was Salman Khan who tried to get his way with her during the shooting of a cola commercial, only to be rebuffed by the Bengali babe. And now rumour has it that Akshay Kumar is completely smitten with her. The two got rather close while shooting for a movie in the romantic locale of the Swiss Alps — close enough to get Akshay's girlfriend Shilpa Shetty, all worked up.

But seriously, what did Shilpa expect? That Akshay would change the habits of a lifetime just because he was going out with her? Surely, even she couldn't be so naive! •



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Dilip Kumar hits the campaign trail for the Congress in UP

Dilip Kumar, doyen of the Indian film industry, is using his charisma to woo Muslims back to the Congress fold. The thespian kicked off the party's election campaign at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, which sends as many as 85 members to Parliament. And sure enough, his presence did help the party to make some headway when he addressed a successful rally at a sprawling open-air auditorium in the walled city on 5 August.

That the Congress was desperate to win back the Muslims was visible from the day Sonia Gandhi took over its reins and made it a point to tender a public apology for the "passive role" the party was accused of playing in the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Her next move was to appoint Salman Khurshid, a former external affairs minister, as the UP Congress chief.

Sure enough, the party is alive to the reality that there were about 22 Lok Sabha constituencies where a substantial 20-30 per cent Muslim vote could tilt the balance in favour of any party. Besides, there were some 13 constituencies where the Muslims stood between 15 and 18 per cent.

Khurshid painstakingly scanned the length and breadth of the vast state to re-establish a one-to-one rapport with the masses. But still there was need for someone to rekindle the lost feeling in them for the party which, with the active support of the minorities, had ruled the nation for four decades.

So, Dilip Kumar came in handy especially at a juncture when the popularity of self-proclaimed Muslim messiah and Samajwadi Party chief, Mulayam Singh Yadav, was going down with the larger section of the community.

Of late, a visibly jittery Mulayam has been proclaiming, "No one can take away the Muslim votes from the Samajwadi Party." He also makes it a point to remind the minority community about the "dubious role of the Congress party in abetting the demolition of the Babri Masjid". He recalls how he had ordered firing on the violent *kar sevaks* who had stormed the mosque earlier in 1990.

While Mulayam's desperation to

Star attra



The Congress is "the only party with a concrete plan and the will to provide water to your fields, to ensure food to hungry stomachs and the sincerity to take the nation ahead," said Dilip Kumar

retain the minority support was quite apparent, Dilip Kumar walked in to throw a spanner in his works. And to make matters worse for the SP supremo, the superstar publicly flayed him for falling into the trap of "fascists, who will not take him anywhere".

In fact, it was at the very outset of his speech that he was confronted by someone in the audience with a query, "You were close to Mulayam Singh Yadav, now you have distanced yourself." Dilip Kumar made no bones about reading out the slip of paper that was pas-

ction

sed to him from below the dais.

He promptly went on to narrate the series of events, beginning with the Bombay riots of 1992-93 that led him to extend support to the SP leader. "Following the Bombay riots, several prominent political leaders from different parts of the country telephoned me; Mulayam was among the first few followed by Laloo Prasad Yadav and Jyoti Basu Saheb, who expressed concern over the developments."

He went on, "But even though all of them showed equal concern and talked of a common objective — to uphold and restrengthen the institutions of democracy and secularism — they spoke different languages; therefore I urged each one of them including Mulayam to first come on a common footing."

Even though the cine star finds the idea of a "Muslim vote" or a "Hindu vote" "repulsive", he was repeatedly referred to as Yusuf Khan, his real name, by the organisers of the rally. That his mass appeal would cut across communal lines is no secret, still some enthusiastic partymen chose to display their naivete by raising slogans of "Yusuf Khan zindabad."

Dilip Kumar's message was clear. "Do not waste your vote and vote for the Congress." Describing the Congress as "the only party with a concrete plan and the will to provide water to your fields, to ensure food to hungry stomachs and the sincerity to take the nation ahead".

As if to make himself doubly sure, he called out to the audience to raise their hands if they really stood to support the Congress, to which the response was spontaneous. The crowds also responded overwhelmingly when he asked them whether they would vote for the Congress.

In his emotionally charged speech, Dilip Kumar flayed the BJP though without touching any specific areas. However, he termed the Kalyan Singh regime as a "jungle ka rajya". He quipped, "When criminals occupy positions of power, how can you expect people to get justice from them?" And in the same vein he asked, "Does this look like the land of Gandhi and Nehru?"

He did not mince words in making a dig at Sharad Pawar for betraying Sonia. "It was these very leaders who had pleaded before her with folded hands that she must come forward to give the Congress a new lease of life. Responding to their request, that woman decided to give up her seclusion and get down to the task of reviving the Congress," he said.

"However, it was regrettable that once the Congress was back on its feet and no sooner than these leaders too gathered the strength to stand up, they got down to finding all kinds of faults with her," he lamented.

It was under such circumstances, he

to give them anything other than lip-service.

The arrival of Salman Khurshid followed by a star campaigner of the stature of Dilip Kumar is bound to give the SP leader some sleepless nights. But what remains to be seen is the Congress's skill to capitalise on its new-found assets. If Dilip Kumar's rally in Lucknow could be any indication, local Congressmen surely failed to make hay out of his presence.

Even as the partymen plead that the two days' notice was "too short" to mobilise large crowds for the rally, there was ample evidence to suggest that total abs-



Mulayam Singh Yadav: visibly jittery

explained, that he had come forward to offer his services for the Congress's revival. "It was the new leadership with a modern and progressive approach that inspired me to do my bit for the party with which my association dates back to 1956," he recalled.

Dilip Kumar has come and gone. He has also held parleys with a cross-section of Muslims, urging them to do away with their antipathy towards the Congress and give its "new and youthful leadership" a chance to prove itself as "truly secular and democratic".

While the disillusionment of Muslims with Mulayam has been growing over the past one year, they continued to rally behind him simply because they had no choice. And Mulayam, knowing that full well, rarely bothered

ence of the least effort to inform Lucknowites about the rally. "Had the local partymen gone around announcing over the microphone in the lanes and by-lanes, the venue would have been packed to capacity," remarked Khwaja Mohd Raiq, a senior citizen and advocate. Said Dhiraj, another local resident, "Even we did not know that Dilip Kumar was going to address a public meeting here."

While Khurshid remained busy attending to his obligations as the state party chief, the other Congress functionaries seemed more keen on getting snapped with the thespian, rather than in ensuring a better public response. Quipped a bystander, "If Mulayam had someone like Dilip Kumar's stature to campaign for his party, he would have mobilised a lakh of people." •

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow

The Booker-winning author has helped internationalise the Narmada Bachao Andolan

Rallying

Arc lights, flash guns, hordes of reporters milling around and swarming crowds — Arundhati Roy has grown accustomed to it all since the day she won the Booker Prize in 1997. Even so, she looked slightly nervous on 31 July as she boarded the train at Indore. Roy was on her way to the Narmada valley to kick off the 'Rally for the Valley' — the just-concluded segment of the free Narmada campaign organised by the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA).

During her five-day visit to the Narmada valley, Roy got acquainted with the ground realities of the place, shared the anxieties of those about to be dispossessed and gave the NBA activists a tremendous boost. "She has electrified the movement," says Alok Agarwal, an NBA leader who is an IIT graduate from Kanpur. Besides, Roy has succeeded in internationalising the movement in a big way — something Medha Patkar and Baba Amte could not do in their 14 years of struggle against the Sardar Sarovar Project.

"Shame, shame don't play the big dam game," reads a placard in a San Francisco protest organised by International Rivers Network. It's a gesture of solidarity with the NBA. There are reports of anti-dam demonstrations in Washington and elsewhere in America, Canada and Japan. Nobel-laureate economist Amartya Sen has invited Roy to deliver a speech in London.

Before leaving for the Narmada valley, Roy told SUNDAY, "[Now] there will be more ambassadors of the valley." But a large section of the motley crowd — representatives of NGOs, students, stage artistes, members of the national and international media — which followed her seemed to lack a clear idea of what they were fighting against. Dilip Mirchandani, formerly an environment engineer in the US who now runs a school in Bombay, joined the rally because he was inspired by *The Greater*



"[Now] there will be more ambassadors of the valley," said Roy, before leaving for Narmada. But a large section of the motley crowd that followed her seemed to lack a clear idea of what they were fighting against

round Roy

Common Good — Roy's treatise on the evils that dams bring in their wake. "It looks like more than an environmental issue..." said Mirchandani.

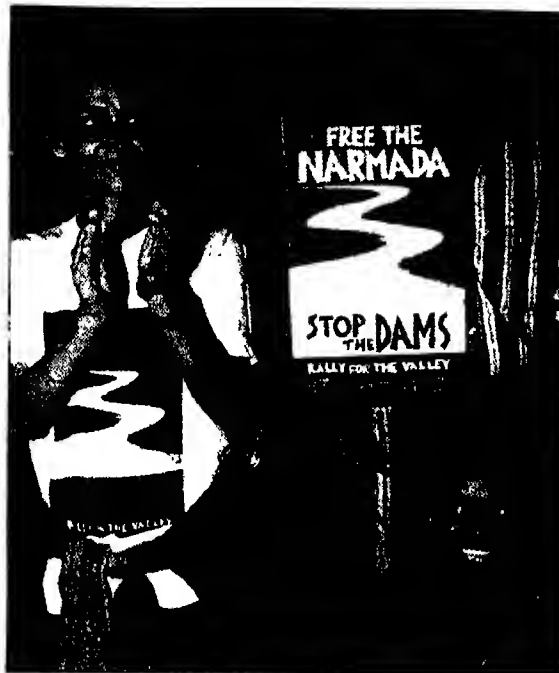
For the benefit of the uninitiated, there was a quick crash course conducted in Kasturbagram, Indore before the party left for the site in five air-conditioned buses. An NBA activist was reading out basic information about the Sardar Sarovar Project — the number of dams to be built on the river, the number of tributaries etc. Even as the lecture was on, a bearded youth with unkempt hair began abusing Roy. The NBA activists had a tough time controlling him.

And then, there was the condom controversy. An English daily in Indore had carried a story saying that the NBA activists used condoms while they were in jail last year in Maheshwar. The story quoted the district administration. When the rally reached Maheshwar — the place where the first-ever private hydel power project in India is underway (which the NBA activists are also protesting against) — the collector and the SDM were gheraoed. Some activists wanted to throw them into the Narmada river. Some activists contend that the condom story was planted by the S. Kumars, the business house which is funding the Maheshwar hydel power project.

The high points of the rally were Roy's meetings with Baba Amte and Medha Patkar who is camping at Jalsindhi, the first village in Madhya Pradesh to be submerged under the waters of the Sardar Sarovar Dam.

Baba was ecstatic to see Roy. Lying under a banyan tree in his ashram on the bank of Narmada, Baba said, "Saraswati has come to Narmada." The jeans-clad Roy sat down on the floor with folded hands to listen to the aged activist who had only praise for the celebrity who had joined forces with him. "My daughter has stirred the conscience of the people," he beamed in delight and appreciation.

Everywhere that the rally went —



Roy has succeeded in focussing international attention on the movement in a big way — something Medha Patkar and Baba Amte could not do in their 14 years of struggle against the Sardar Sarovar Project

Pathwad, Mandleshwar, Kasrawad, Anjad, Nisarpur, Kakarana — Roy was feted like a princess by the locals. Large number of tribals gathered around, showering her with petals in the traditional way. She spoke a few words in Hindi to them, the little that she could manage. "Why should the dam be constructed?" she asked. "The fight against the dam would continue." The crowd cheered and hung upon every word that she spoke.

The NBA's plans to take Roy to Jalsindhi by a motorboat was thwarted by the administration which did not want her to cross the swelling river. It would be dangerous to travel upstream all the way with the river in full spate, they said. When the rally reached the Aakadia village, the collector and the superintendent of police were present. They advised the NBA activists to take a different route and give up the idea of travelling by boat. So Roy was taken to Jalsindhi by a shorter route.

At Jalsindhi, Medha Patkar with representatives of the Bhil and Bhalala tribes, received her with a warm welco-

me. "After 14 years of struggle, another force has joined us," said the soft-spoken Medha. "Arundhati has brought us upper class support."

Amidst cries of "Narmadamaiya kohin chhe? Hamri chhe, hamri chhe..." (Who does Narmada belong to? It belongs to us), Arundhati uttered a few sentences and then made way for Patkar who can speak the local dialects fluently.

When SUNDAY asked Roy in Indore how long would she like to continue working on the issue, Roy said, "I don't know. I really don't know for how long. Whatever I could do I have already done, financially, through this rally..." while admitting that much still remains to be done.

Indeed, there's need for a more focussed attention — on the Sardar Sarovar Project and other ecological disasters waiting to happen. And who better than an internationally-known author-activist like Arundhati Roy to motivate people, mobilise public opinion and make things happen? •

Deshdeep Saxena/Indore and Bhopal

'Big dams cannot solve problems'

Union environment minister **Suresh Prabhu** speaks out against the Narmada project

INTERVIEWED BY SANJAY KAPOOR/NEW DELHI

There is something about the personality of the Union minister of environment and forests, Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu, that defies every conceivable stereotype. His demeanour is unlike that of a politician, especially of the Shiv Sainik variety. Prabhu, if anything, looks like a computer nerd in search of a floppy titled 'politics'.

In his views, too, the environment minister is 'different'. A chartered accountant by training, he is not driven by financial bottom lines. He does not articulate the views of the establishment that has, over the years, sponsored environmental degradation in the name of undefined development. He is a green minister who knows that the next millennium is for people like him.

Prabhu stumps you when he sees merit in Booker Award-winner Arundhati Roy's 'Rally for the valley' to save the Narmada valley. Unsure of whether an environment impact study had been conducted on Narmadasagar in the past, Prabhu feels that rehabilitation work for oustees has been 'abysmal'.

He forcefully pleads for redefining 'development' and changing its existing paradigms. Prabhu is against big dams. He hopes that all alternatives would be explored before any big dam is conceived in the future.

Prabhu has fine-tuned an alternative development plan for the north-east and the Western Ghats — two hot spots of biodiversity. Here, he wants the state governments to take up a massive programme of bamboo cultivation that can provide employment to entire village communities. If it has done wonders in China, Prabhu asserts, why can't it happen in India?

It is in politics that Prabhu conforms to stereotype. He is respectful towards his supremo Bal Thackeray and aggressively claims that he has been 'unjustly' disenfranchised by the President.

Prabhu is articulate, sincere and confident. He is contesting from the Rajapur parliamentary constituency in Maharashtra from where he hopes to return with a 'huge margin'. "The situation on the ground is in my favour," claims Prabhu after his recent visit to his constituency. Extracts from the interview:

On the Narmada project

For years, big dams were seen as panacea for all development needs. Due to this no other alternatives were explored. I do not believe that big dams can solve problems the way they had been projected in the past.

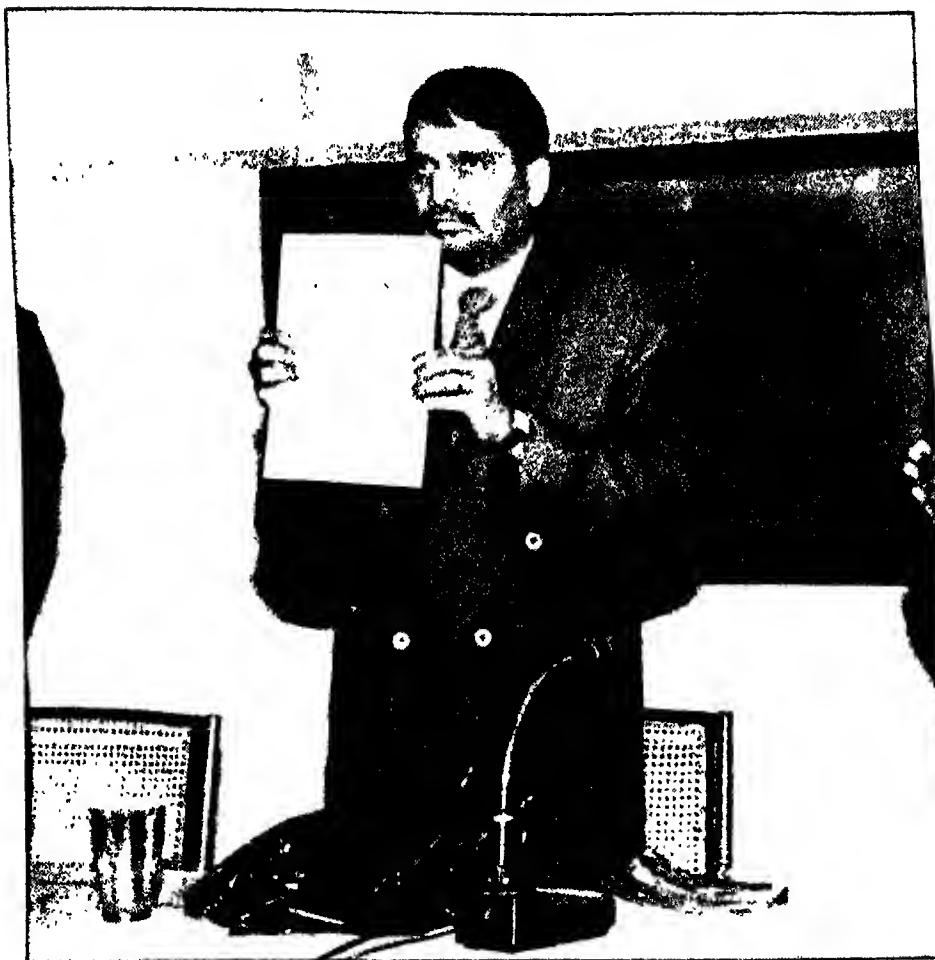
The impact on human beings and environment was not studied properly when these projects were cleared. When disproportionate amount of water is stored in a land mass that is not equipped to take that burden, then eruptions like earthquakes could take place.

However, my worry and that of the department is rehabilitation of those who have had to leave their traditional land. We sent a team to these areas seven months back and found that rehabilitation was not up to the desired level. I even wrote to the state governments and told them that they had not been able to fulfil their obligations towards people uprooted from villages that would be inundated by the Narmada waters. But you know how things work.

One of the steps that I have taken to ensure that those behind mega projects give primacy to rehabilitation is that I have asked them to submit bank guarantees for it. If the



Tribals of the Narmada valley: "My worry is rehabilitation"



"I wrote to the state governments that they had not been able to fulfil their obligations towards people uprooted from villages that would be inundated by the Narmada waters. But you know how things work"

rehabilitation is not up to the mark then we would encash the bank guarantees.

But we want to be more careful about such projects in the future. We need to use the experience from the Narmada valley project and ensure that we do not repeat the same mistakes.

What needs to be recognised is that the harm caused to the environment by such projects is a lot more than the benefits. Most of the cost-benefit analysis is wrong as they are calculated from a historical standpoint and do not take into account the opportunity costs that may reveal themselves in the future.

On Arundhati Roy and the 'Rally for the valley'

Arundhati is a sincere and articulate activist against the Narmada dam. I respect her views. She cannot be brushed aside as an elitist urban reaction. We need to use her views as input for the future.

On the need to redefine development

For the first time my ministry has come out with a state of the environment report. My endeavour has been to search for new alternatives and paradigms of development so that we do not allow depletion of natural resources. We should

also see that the cures that we envisage for preserving the environment do not end up as diseases themselves.

We need to have a re-look at all those symbols of modernisation that have not been questioned at all. Roads, for example, have been a cause for environmental disasters. In the hilly region they have been a cause for major landslides. Why do we need roads in the higher reaches of the Himalayas?

In my Rajapur constituency there were areas that did not have roads. The people of this part were well-fed and healthy. First, a road was constructed and later we built a health centre. Now we find that the people there are no longer as healthy as they were earlier.

In the coming days we need to take a hard look at even the power plants. In 50 years time with existing technology we would need 50 per cent of the national land mass to store the fly ash coming from power plants. If we do not start now then we would be sitting atop an environmental disaster.

Development of the north-east

We need to recognise that we cannot have the same model of development for north-east as for other parts of the country. After all, the north-east and Western Ghats are the two hot spots of biodiversity that cannot be sacrificed on the altar of mindless industrialisation. Having said that, we

also need to remember that the people living in this area need fruitful employment. Surely they cannot be made to pay a heavy price for maintaining ecological balance.

After considerable hard work and field studies we have realised that bamboo cultivation has the potential to transform the lives of the people of this region without disturbing the ecology. China is exporting Rs 40,000-crore worth of bamboo products. There is no reason why we cannot generate similar kind of returns. India's potential is a lot more.



In north-east there are only one crore people whose per capita income can go up if the bamboo cultivation programme is taken up in the right earnest. The good thing about bamboo is that it involves the entire village community from farmers to artisans. It is not limiting as refinery that only gives employment to one member of the family and that too, if he is trained.

In case of bamboo, only native skills are required. Another advantage of a bamboo-based economy is that people get clean water and air, which end up being a casualty when refineries are set up. It would also help in stopping insurgency and rural-urban migration.

We are trying to teach the people how value could be added to the bamboo. According to our findings, 150 different products can be made out of it that we have a ready market for. In Mizoram we are starting a pilot project. Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga has resolved to make his state the richest through bamboo cultivation. The programme envisages providing marketing opportunities to bamboo-based products. Star trading houses, too, have promised to push bamboo products abroad.

We have started a bamboo cell in the ministry. Funds are coming from World Bank, UNIDO and other agencies.

Environmental clearance to industries

We have clearly laid down the policy for environmental clearance. Our philosophy is that you can only put up a project if you minimise the environment loss. And if you think



there might be some loss to the environment then you have to pay for it.

We have asked the industrialists and entrepreneurs to pay one per cent of the project cost to the Environment Fund. Our philosophy is that we would not wait for them to pollute the environment and then make them pay. We would take the money first.

To reduce possibilities of corruption in environmental clearance, I have made decision making extremely transparent. We have put all the proposals on the net. If anyone has any objections, they are recorded. It is a continuous public hearing that goes on through the net. This has reduced the element of discretion, too, that normally obtains in government departments.

I have also insisted that they should go in for zero-emission technology. All diesel-manufacturing units should go towards reducing the sulphur content from 0.25 to 0.05.

We are slowly trying to introduce systemic changes.

The problem of Van Gujjars and exploitation by forest guards

We have to agree on one thing, that four-and-a-half per cent of the national mass has to be reserved for forests that is free from the presence of human beings.

The reason why I am insisting on this is that presence of human beings in these areas threatens the survival of tiger



"Arundhati is a sincere and articulate activist against the Narmada dam. I respect her views. She cannot be brushed aside as an elitist urban reaction. We need to use her views as input for the future"

that is at the apex of the food chain. If tiger becomes extinct then it would cause problems for human beings, too.

People talk of a symbiotic relationship between tribals and forests, but we are not willing to pay a heavy price for such romantic notions. Depletion of forest is a major national concern and we cannot compromise with anything that threatens it.

I understand Van Gujjars present a problem but we need a creative solution to it. Why not create man-managed forests that are over and above the existing forest cover where such indigenous people can stay and eke out a living. This is the first time I am articulating such a solution.

Forest fires

Forest fires are both natural and man-made. Last year in

the UP hills, a long summer and paucity of rain was responsible for the fires. But increasingly fires are becoming a norm as the people living in these areas feel alienated with their immediate environment.

Earlier, when they were staying in the forests then they would douse any flames that they would see lest it consumes their houses. Now most of the people feel preserving the forests is the responsibility of the forest guards.

I found out that the loss we incur due to forest fires is many times more than the money that we need to control it. Fire-fighting equipment is primitive. The money that has been allocated for it is a scandal. It has just been Rs 2 crore every year. Planning Commission refuses to give more. Due to my efforts we spent Rs 17 crore in fighting fires last year. I agree with you that we need to work harder on this front.

Disenfranchisement of Balasaheb Thackeray

Disenfranchising a person is the most retrograde step. In a democracy such a thing is unacceptable. Ironically, all those people who were opposing the move of the Pakistani government to disenfranchise journalist Najam Sethi are



Bal Thackeray: "Balasaheb did not incite communal passions"

applauding President's move against Balasaheb.

In a multi-party democracy, we need to respect different viewpoints. The best way to find out if a particular view is acceptable to the masses is to raise it during the elections. Why is it all right to talk about it in the columns of the newspapers and not during the elections? There are some of the questions that we need to answer. Balasaheb did not incite communal passions and his remarks were used out of context.

The relationship between Shiv Sena, BJP and Pawar

Between SS-BJP the relationship is good and enduring. Ours is a natural marriage. I do not think that BJP has anything to do with Pawar. BJP has denied it and we have no reason to distrust them. •



Leaving in style

Nirad C. Chaudhuri: the last journey

On 13 July, 1999, a day after he suffered a mild stroke, Nirad C. Chaudhuri put pen to paper for the last time in his 101 years. "I am better," he wrote and then scrawled several times — "Gregorian Chants".

He had probably wanted to listen to the music but nobody in the house at the time could read the scrawl and it lay by his bedside. His son Prithvi who reached from Calcutta after his father's death on 6 August, deciphered the writing. Gregorian Chants were played at the funeral as Chaudhuri's coffin was consigned to the flames.

As in life, Nirad Chaudhuri wanted things to be done his way even after his death. The man who had walked the streets of Oxford always impeccably dressed in his tweed jacket, hat and walking stick, wanted to make his last journey through the same streets in his white dhoti and *punjabi*, wearing the two gold buttons his wife gave him on their wedding day, nearly 67 years ago. Ever since her death in September 1994, he had been longing to join her at the Oxford Crematorium but had resigned himself to the fact that the business of death was not in his hands.

"There is only one thing certain in life, and that is death. There is only one thing uncertain, and that is when it will come," he used to say. In numerous interviews with SUNDAY, over a space of ten years, he had said he was a classic case of the 'survival of the unfittest'.

Over the last one and half years, Nirad Chaudhuri had become intensely lonely. His frail body grew weak and he was wheel-chair bound for the first time in



Photographs and assorted memorabilia on display

his life. For a man who was like a tightly-coiled spring of energy — prancing around the house, choosing his books and music, cooking his own meals and doing his own shopping — the confinement became a torture. The mind was actively racing on, but the body wouldn't allow the flow. It depressed him. After his wife's death, Chaudhuri had moved out of their bedroom to the living room downstairs. Surrounded by his books and music, it's there he breathed his last.

Towards the end his desire to speak in Bengali and listening to Rabindra Sangeet intensified. On his 101st birthday he had sung *Ami Chini Go Chini...* (a Rabindra Sangeet) in a small gathering of friends. He would also talk a lot

about his birthplace in Kishoreganj (now in Bangladesh). "He even started talking to me in *Bangal* [a dialect of East Bengal]," said his son Prithvi.

Perhaps it was this attachment to his home country in Bangladesh that stirred his Bangladeshi admirers like Mohammed Moin-ul Islam who came all the way from Ottawa to attend his funeral. "I am a blind admirer. I had gone to Kishoreganj recently just to visit the place where Nirad C. Chaudhuri was born," he said. "I had to come to pay my last respects."

Martin Gwynne who had sought the 100-year-old Chaudhuri out on a trip to London, was so enamoured by the writer that he came to Oxford to pay his last respects as well. "I found in him the complete English gentleman, a species that no longer exists," says Gwynne.

"And it was intriguing to find that it was an Indian who had all the qualities of an elegant Englishman from a Victorian age."

Hugo Brunner of Oxford University Press remembered how Chaudhuri, at his 100th birthday celebrations, had managed to correct Hugo's pronunciation of a Latin word from the Queen's telegram.

"I am a Bengali and an Englishman," Chaudhuri would say. "I have tried to combine two cultures: the Bengali *bhadralok* and the English gentleman, and I think I have succeeded."

On 2 August, 1997, just before his 100th birthday, the vice-chancellor of Visva Bharati University travelled to London to confer on Chaudhuri the University's highest award — the

SHRABANI BASU



SHRABANI BASU



The hearse leaves 20 Lathbury Road

The man who had walked the streets of Oxford, always impeccably dressed in English clothes, wanted to make his last journey through the same streets in his white dhoti and *punjabi*

The last few lines scribbled by Chaudhuri



Desikottama. Chaudhuri received the honour wearing his dhoti-punjabi and shawl and the DLitt robes conferred on him by Oxford University. Round his neck was the CBE medal given by the Queen. It was as if a hundred years of the subcontinent's history was epitomised in a little man who had only one com-

ment to make by way of an acceptance speech: "When I write in English I am not writing as an Indian or an Englishman. I am just a writer. Writers know no nationality."

At his funeral, tributes from the President of India, his publishers and

friends were read out to the strains of Rabindra Sangeet and Mozart. Chaudhuri's Lathbury Road residence had been converted into a museum of sorts with assorted memorabilia on display — hats, walking sticks, his favourite Saville Row suit which he spent a fortune on when he could ill-afford it, his favourite

Whenever he talked of his own death, I would ask him to wait till the next millennium and be one of the few people to have lived in three centuries. But all he wanted was to join his wife by getting to the Oxford Crematorium on the fast track

gold-bound edition of *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, his CBE medal, the Queen's citation, photographs of Amiya Chaudhuri and him in Oxford, his favourite photograph of Amiya holding up baby Dhruva (their first-born) and another one of her feeding the ducks.

Among Chaudhuri's treasured possessions was a bottle of vintage port, dating back to 1871, which he never had the heart to open. His son Prithvi — who has inherited his vast fortune of rare and antique books and paintings — has decided to open the bottle and drink in the honour of his father.

Whenever he talked of his own death, I would ask him to wait a little longer, so he could see the millennium and be one of the few people in the world to have lived in three centuries. He, of course, would dismiss it, saying he did not want any more records. All he wanted was to join his wife by getting to the Oxford Crematorium on the fast track.

He made it there all right, just the way he had wanted to. With his exit the curtains close on a hundred years of brilliance, as also on the final chapter of a book perfectly scripted by Nirad C. Chaudhuri. •

Shrabani Basu/Oxford

Take heart

A new technique of cardiac surgery is introduced in eastern India

B.M. Birla Heart Research Centre, a super-speciality hospital in Calcutta, has notched up an impressive feat. Last week, the hospital announced that it has developed facilities for "minimally invasive heart surgery on adults, children and even new-born babies". While the technique is not new, it was the first time that such a facility was available in eastern India.

Minimally invasive heart surgery is now the buzzword across the world in treating complex heart ailments. The idea is to perform the operation on a beating heart. Till now, bypass grafting and open heart surgeries were performed after stopping the heart. There were certain problems associated with this.

When the heart of a patient was stopped by surgeons during an operation, circulation was carried out using heart-lung machines, oxygenator and other complicated hardware. In doing so, a number of factors in a patient's blood were altered and even destroyed. To get over this problem, large quantities of blood had to be supplied from outside.

Moreover, conventional bypass and open-heart surgeries required long incisions on the chest and other parts of the body from where grafts were harvested for use as bypass. As a result, patients took a long time to recuperate. During the post-operative period, patients had to be ventilated for a long time because in conventional surgery, the chest bones were cut to gain access to the heart, making breathing difficult once patients revived.

All these can now be avoided in a minimally invasive surgery. But in order to do so, the surgeons will have to operate on a beating heart. Two factors become crucial while operating on a beating heart. First and foremost is the skill of the surgeon. The second factor is an instrument called the stabilising device. Usually, it is a clamp-like instrument, which, when fitted to a specific portion of a beating heart, keeps that portion absolutely still so that the surgeon can work on it.

Stabilising devices now in use the world over are single-use disposable equipment. It is here that Dr Ajay Kaul

— who is leading the BMBHRC 'minimally-invasive' team along with Dr P.K. Mittal — has made a breakthrough. Kaul, along with his friend, has designed a metal stabilising device which can be used over and over again. Using this device, Kaul has performed a number of minimally invasive heart operations

what in medical parlance is known as, 'morbidity' in patients. All these mean less number of days spent in the hospital, hence less cost.

Initial cost estimates of minimally-invasive technique are close to Rs 1 lakh. BMBHRC has an on-going package whereby children are treated at a con-



Dr Mittal (left) with his tiny patient: a new beginning

rations with 100 per cent success rate. They have applied for an Indian patent of the re-usable stabilising device.

A number of bypass and open-heart operations have been performed at BMBHRC using the minimally-invasive technique. Multi-vessel bypass grafting has been done on a young girl from Mizoram. An emergency operation was performed on 24 July on a ten-day-old baby by Dr Mittal, using the minimally invasive technique. The baby has recovered completely.

There are a number of advantages that the minimally invasive technique offers. By excluding the use of heart-lung machines and other hardware used in perfusion, it reduces a number of post-operative risks. Minimally invasive technique also involves a small incision, thereby reducing the recuperation time and,

cessional rate. At times, the doctors have to abandon the minimally invasive technique in favour of the conventional procedure. And in order to do so, the requisite hardware, like the heart-lung machine, has to be kept on stand by when doctors are attempting a minimally invasive technique.

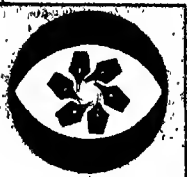
But how reliable is the new method? "Some doctors were sceptical about its efficacy. We have done endoscopic and other studies to establish that the procedure is equally reliable," pointed out Kaul.

The financial benefits of minimally invasive cardiac surgery are obvious. The medical benefits will be established firmly as more and more patients opt for this technique. •

Sourabh Sen/Calcutta

The quinnny

*Sexual morality,
Elizabeth, the Indian
Censor Board and
The Times of India*



Some decades back when I first landed in Bombay and then Gujarat, I found something common. Parents and teachers all over urged their sons

and daughters to read the edit pages of *The Times of India* to improve their English. I don't know if the formula worked or not. I found the edit pages of *TOI* quite interesting. Mr Sham Lal, who was then the editor of the paper often wondered 'where do we go from here' and quoted copiously from Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Aldous Huxley to prove his point.

What is the situation now? Do today's parents still urge their sons and daughters to read the *TOI* edit pages to improve their standards of English? Let us visit a typical Bombay home and find out:

*Scene 1: A Bombay flat.
Twelve-year-old Ramesh is browsing through the pages of The Times of India, while his father is watching the television news. The mother is busy in the kitchen.*

Dad: Ramesh, finish the paper quickly. I want to have a look at it. Did you read the editorials?

Ramesh: Not really, dad. There is something more interesting in the edit page. By the way, what is a quinnny?

Dad: What did you say, quinnny? Did you check the dictionary?

Ramesh: Yes dad, but the word is not there. I hope it is not a bad word.

Dad: Ha, do you think the editorial

pages of *The Times* will carry bad words? They are as pure as the snow. I know it, my father knew it. If our English is good, it was only because we read every word which appeared in the edit pages.

Ramesh: Did you ever come across the word quinnny in the edit pages of *TOI*?

Dad: I don't think so. Perhaps, there was a typo. The word should have been queen, queenly or something like that. These days, there are occasional proof-reading errors on the edit pages.

Ramesh: I also think it had something to do with the queen. Well, it is given here... queen's private part.

Dad (agitated): Let me have a look. I don't think *TOI* edit pages will mention

anything like that.

Ramesh: Dad, what is a private part? Something like the private sector and the public sector?

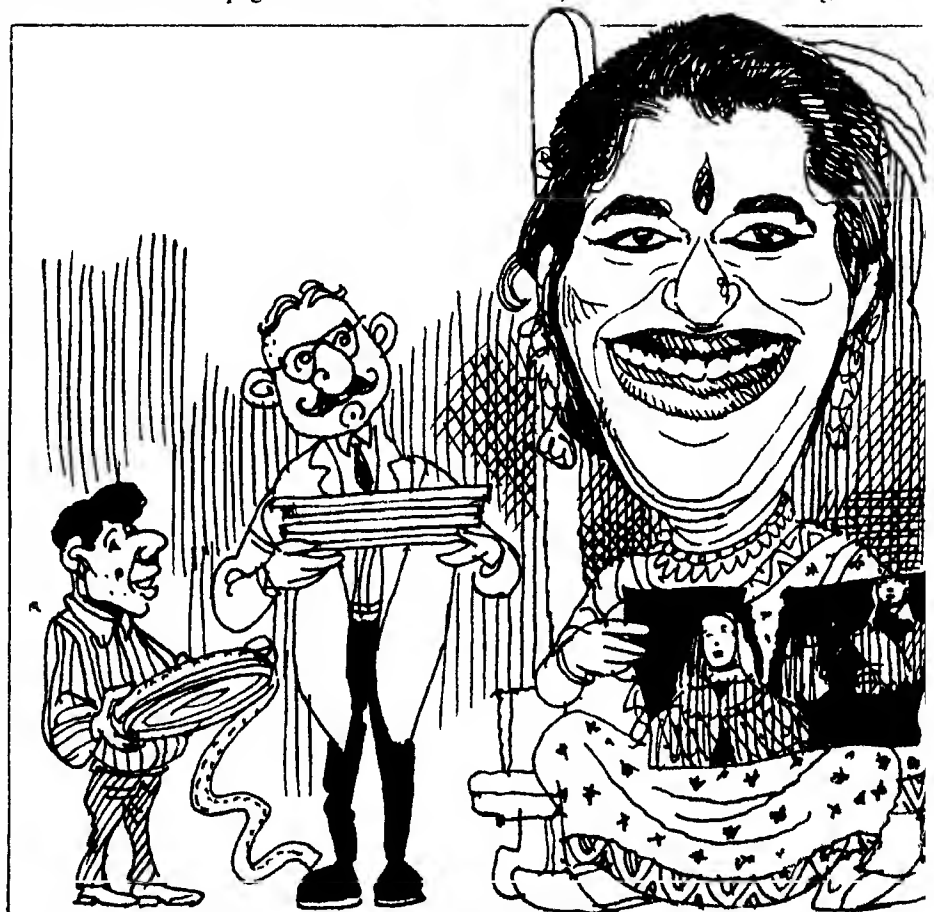
Dad: Don't rattle on. Who uttered the words quinnny and private part?

Ramesh: Former film star Asha Parekh. She was interviewed for the edit pages and said something about 'being naked in bed with you rubbing my hands on your thighs and touching your quinnny'. Dad, don't jump like that... look, you broke that flower vase, Mummy will be upset.

(Mummy enters the room from the kitchen.)

Mummy: What is going on here?

Ramesh: I just asked dad the meaning of



drama

the word quunny which appeared in the edit page of *The Times* and he is all upset.

Mummy: Oh, there is nothing to worry about. Must be a nice word. After all, it appeared in the edit pages of *The Times*. And we know how 'clean' the paper is. If it were something undesirable, they would have mentioned 'alleged quunny' or something like that. Who mentioned quunny?

Ramesh: Film star Asha Parekh.

Mummy: Then don't bother about it. She was an adorable heroine. The noble soul of *Kati Patang*! Never exposed on the screen, never used bad language and was never associated with hot scenes. If she used the word quunny, we do not

have to worry.

Ramesh: Than why is daddy so upset? Asha Parekh also said in the edit pages of *TOI* that quunny was a woman's private part. She also referred to a man's buttocks and woman's breasts in the interview.

(Suddenly there is total silence in the room.)

Dad: Okay Ramesh, get ready to go to school (exit Ramesh)

Mummy: What is happening to *The Times*? How can they use such words in edit pages? Don't they know this is a family newspaper? Why don't you write a letter of protest to the editor?

Dad: *The Times* does not have an editor. And they publish only letters which prai-

se the newspaper. If I write to them that there should be more quunnys in the edit pages, then they would publish the letter.

Mummy: How can we tell our kids to read *TOI* edit pages and improve their English standards, if they published words like quunny, buttocks and breasts. Please do something...

Dad: Okay, from tomorrow, we shall get *The Indian Express*.

Scene 2: Ramesh's school. The English class is about to start. Ramesh looks thoughtful. The English teacher enters.

Teacher: Good morning boys

Students: Good morning teacher.

Teacher: We discussed ways and means to improve your vocabulary last time. I told you to read the edit pages of *The Times of India* regularly and pick up one new word every day. Ramesh, what new word did you learn today from the edit pages of the paper?

Ramesh: Er, teacher, quunny, that's the word I learnt today.

Teacher: Be careful, it must be queenly. There is no word as quunny. And *The Times* does not make such mistakes.

Ramesh: But it is here madam, in the edit pages. When I asked my parents what the word meant, they packed me off to school. Here, let me show you the paper.

(The teacher goes through the paper and frowns.)

Another Student: Teacher, this must be a nice word. *The Times* used it many times in page one. And if famous director Shekhar Kapur used the word constantly, there should not be anything wrong with it. He says that quunny was the most important word in his film *Elizabeth*. We should learn and master such an important word.

Teacher: Is it in the front page also? Let me see. I think this matter should be referred to the principal.

(There is excitement in the class as the teacher rushes to the principal's room.)

Ramesh: Gosh, I hope the principal knows what quunny is. *The Times* editorial pages are tough to follow, but they should not use words which are not understood even by our parents and teacher. If the principal is also found ignorant, we shall telephone the editor and find out. I don't understand Asha Parekh's explanation of the word. Or we can wait for the time when *The Times* will carry an editorial on quunny •



"Asha Parekh was an adorable heroine. Never exposed on the screen, never used bad language and was never associated with hot scenes. If she used the word quunny, we do not have to worry"

Bhaichung strikes

India's ace footballer lands a contract with an English club

Decades ago, Masud Faqri had become the first Indian to participate in English football. Since he settled down in Britain, there were no ripples of excitement on our shores. But that third division entry has been bettered by Bhaichung Bhutia, who has signed a three-year contract with second division club Bury.

While this is not an earth-shattering development, it could be the beginning of a new lease of life for Indian football. "He could become the conduit for Indian players going abroad," said former India captain Chuni Goswami. "For the first time, an Indian will be playing abroad which means there will be an awareness of Indian potential," he added.

"Secondly, it's a great break for him personally. If he plays well in the league this season, he could be invited over by a higher-placed club, perhaps even in the

premier division. In any case, this contract will encourage youngsters and give them a new goal."

If Bhutia succeeds, the path for others will become much smoother. And with a goal of both money and fame to goad them on, budding footballers will be encouraged to go all out.

For Indian football as a whole, it could be nothing better than a host of youngsters playing abroad and honing their skills, because these very players will then be able to take the country far ahead in international standings.

But it was no cakewalk for Bhaichung. Last year, he had made an unsuccessful attempt. This year, he went better prepared. After a short training stint in Sweden, he tried several clubs in England. Fulham and Crystal Palace followed Aston Villa. Finally, it was Bury in the Manchester suburbs where he

found a berth, after ten days of trials and a hat-trick in a friendly tie.

For an unknown player, it is usually a long search for a place in any side. Bhaichung's agent had lined up West Bromwich Albion, Ipswich, Sheffield United and Walsall, but he managed to turn up only for the first club and that, too, for one trial. Obviously, for a thorough search, a player would need the time and the means to spend up to six months in Europe. A tall order, especially for an Indian.

What will work for Bhaichung is his speed, which no Indian player could match. More important, the youngster is dedicated enough to give a hundred and ten per cent. He has sharp reflexes and never gives up.

He does have a drawback though. Physically, he is well below the average in English football. While the pace in English soccer is perhaps the fastest in the world, the game is quite physical in the league. With his height and build, he would find defenders in the opposition quite formidable. But then even Maradona started out as a skinny four-foot something. He gradually built muscles that complemented his artistry and turned him into a mega star.

The first phase of his career started at the Tashi Namgyal Academy in Gangtok, moved on to East Bengal and JCT and culminated in the Asian Football Confederation's 'Best Asian Footballer' award for May 1999. He is about to begin the second and, probably, the best period.

In between, however, Mohun Bagan club is trying to rope him in for two matches. The premier Indian side will be meeting its Bangladesh counterpart, Mukti Joddha, in the first round of the Asian Club Cup championship. The home and away matches are to be played a fortnight apart in August and September and Bhaichung's inclusion would give Bagan a tremendous fillip.

Even if this deal does not come through, Bhaichung Bhutia will be in the limelight this year. He is in line for the prestigious Arjuna Award, the highest recognition a player can achieve in the country. •

Arjit Sen/Calcutta



Bhaichung Bhutia: It hadn't been a cakewalk

ASHOK CHAKRABARTY



STRONG-ARM MEASURES: file picture of a counter-insurgency operation in Assam

A S S A M

Know your people

A training school at Solmara teaches security forces the Assamese way of life

Lack of adequate knowledge of the Assamese way of life on the part of security personnel engaged in counter-insurgency (CI) operations in the state has led to many problems, including that of the unnecessary harassment of innocent people. To do away with these, the army authorities in Assam have introduced training programmes for the security personnel who come to the state from other parts of India.

Recently, the GOC of the 4 Corps of the army, Lt-Gen D.B. Shekatkar has revealed that a counter-insurgency training school has been opened in Solmara in the Sonitpur district where army men and personnel from other security forces are given training on the various aspects of the Assamese way of life before they engage in counter-insurgency operations in the state.

According to Shekatkar, the training course involves a six-week programme with adequate emphasis on the various aspects of Assamese culture. The areas covered under the course also include human rights, religious sentiments of the Assamese, the economy of the state, tips on how to interact with the people etc. He said that apart from the officers of the army,

judicial magistrates, academicians, members of the state Human Rights Commission and other prominent people are invited to deliver the lectures.

So far, around 6,000 security personnel have completed the six-week course. The Assam Police personnel are also given training here but the capsule meant for policemen from the state is different as there is no need to familiarise them with local culture and customs.

The 4 Corps GOC admitted that the language barrier was proving to be a major drawback in counter-insurgency operations in Assam as people belonging to the hinterland did not know Hindi. He said that it was better for the securitymen to know the local language rather than expecting the locals to know the language of the army.

Stressing the need for training of army personnel, Shekatkar pointed out that there was a big difference between conventional war and counter-insurgency operations. In conventional war, the army used maximum force and heavy artillery. But the method had to be totally different in case of a CI operation. "The CI operations are against our own brothers who may be misguided and in such cases, the motto is to use minimum pos-

sible force and try and bring them back to the mainstream with persuasion, if possible," Shekatkar pointed out.

It appears that the training programme has yielded desired results as allegations of harassment by the army have come down drastically in recent months. Shekatkar also said that efforts to bring the army closer to the common people would continue.

Meanwhile, according to the DIG of the Border Security Force (BSF), Ashok Kumar, in the latter half of July, the ULFA shifted three of its main camps further inside Bhutan to avoid conflict with the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA). This happened after the Bhutan government took a stand to evict militants from its soil. The Bhutan government had held two rounds of talks with ULFA leaders, and during the discussions, they had agreed to reduce the number of troops instead of leaving the area. Ashok Kumar said that the camps have been shifted 100 km away from Daifam and Kalikhola.

On the political front, as the Lok Sabha elections approach, political parties as well as the people in the state are observing with keen interest as to what ULFA's stand vis-a-vis the elections will be. During the last Lok Sabha elections, the ULFA had given the call for a poll boycott. And after its ignominious defeat, the ruling AGP had tried to blame it on an alleged ULFA-Congress nexus. The AGP had accused the Congress of engineering the ULFA poll boycott to prevent AGP supporters from casting their votes. The Congress, which swept the last Lok Sabha elections in the state by clinching 11 seats, had challenged the AGP to prove the allegation.

Political observers in Assam believe that the ULFA diktat regarding the polls last time had gone in favour of the Congress as the militant outfit hardly has any influence in the traditional minority votebank of the party. On the other hand, the poll boycott call had affected the AGP support base.

This time, the ULFA has already appealed to political parties contesting the elections in Assam to include the demand for the right of self-determination in their election manifesto. As of now, it remains a wait-and-watch game •

Dileep Chandra/Guwahati

UTTAR PRADESH

Lockhorns

Kalyan Singh and the Election Commission slug it out

"Kalyan Singh ko gussa kyon ata hai?" This is a question that often does the rounds of the administrative circles in Lucknow. If it's poll time, the cause of the Uttar Pradesh chief minister's ire is, invariably, the Election Commission (EC).

At the moment, Kalyan Singh and the EC are set on a collision course over two contentious issues — the commission's ban on ministers enjoying official facilities for travel within the state; and the commission's objection to the government's recent move to appoint 3,000 teachers in rural UP's secondary schools.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in Lucknow is, understandably, upset over the EC's opposition to its educational programme. It throws the Kalyan Singh



THE ANGRY CM: Kalyan Singh

administration's ambitious decentralisation programme into jeopardy. An ambitious new educational policy, involving the appointment of several thousand primary school teachers in the rural areas, forms a vital part of the chief minister's much-publicised decentralisation scheme in consonance with the introduction of Panchayati Raj in Uttar Pradesh.

The state government argues that since these appointments had been made locally, on a contractual basis, with fixed salaries, they do not violate the election 'code of conduct'.

The EC, however, thinks otherwise. It regards this appointment programme as a direct pre-poll sop to the rural voter. "Why is the government in such a hurry to implement this programme? Would the heavens fall if these teachers start receiving a monthly remuneration of Rs 5,000 after two months?" demanded an EC official.

House of lord

Policemen in Serampore are forced to operate out of a temple

Courts are known to be temples of justice. But nothing could come as close to this as the Serampore court. Located a few kilometres away from Calcutta, in the Hooghly district, this particular court building is no mean thing. The sub-divisional officer (SDO) has his office in its premises. Undertrials from neighbouring police stations of Uttarpara, Chanditala, Jangipara and Serampore are brought here everyday. So are prisoners from the Serampore sub-jail.

But a year-and-a-half ago, the state PWD declared the building in which the court lock-up was housed as condemned. Facing this stricture, the police who were manning the lock-up have taken shelter inside a Shiva temple which is located within the court premises.

But eviction is not the only loss of face for the cops manning the lock-up. Every morning, a couple of policemen sit with their lock-up register, under the watchful gaze of the deity, keeping track of prisoners who are brought to the court for trial. While the temple serves as the makeshift office, the prisoners are kept in the police van which, once

Then, there's the controversial clamp-down on ministerial travels following the imposition of the election code of conduct. This ban has been severely condemned in the state Assembly. Speaker Kesri Nath Tripathi regarded this move to be an "overstepping of authority by the Election Commission". Tripathi criticised the commission for "directly interfering in the working of the state legislature".

Kalyan Singh has decided to take this fight to the country's apex court. The UP chief minister insists that the EC is being unfair and that it is prejudiced against his government. "The Election Commission's order banning movement of ministers virtually imposes a restriction on their discharge of duties as ministers," argues Singh. "The restriction appears illogical, since the commission has not imposed any such bar on the movement of central ministers even though it is a Lok Sabha election, not an Assembly election."

A senior official of the EC told SUNDAY: "Nobody was going to object to any genuine travel by ministers, it was only when such travel was used for political purposes in the run-up to the polls that the objection was raised." He also maintained that these visits by ministers led to unnecessary diversion of security personnel and district officials.

According to political observers in the state capital, the "reduction in the travel expenses to which the ministers were otherwise entitled has hit them where it hurts". "Cabinet ministers in UP were entitled to tour and travel expenses up to Rs 5 lakh per month. On an average, members of the state Cabinet have been taking reimbursements up to Rs 4 lakh per month," reveals a Vidhan Sabha official.

With the chief minister refusing to toe the EC line, it might be left to the Supreme Court to lay down the rules of the pre-poll game in Uttar Pradesh.

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow

MADHYA PRADESH

Reported against

A Vidhan Sabha committee recommends action against Ambikapur district officials for derailing a murder probe

The incident took place way back on 3 December, 1998. It was business as usual at the government girls college at Ambikapur, a tribal district in eastern Madhya Pradesh, bordering Bihar. A jeep with four local boys from the neighbouring postgraduate college arrived. Driving recklessly, they were trying to 'impress' the girls coming into the college.

Priti Srivastava was a student of BA final in the same college. She also became a target of eve-teasing, and when the boys failed to impress Priti, they allegedly crushed her to death. It was a ghastly murder which had shocked the nation. But more shocking was the way the district administration tried to hush up the case. Witnesses to the ghastly murder were intimidated and eventually chief minister Digvijay Singh had to step in to ensure that the alleged culprits were brought to book.

And now, a Vidhan Sabha committee, headed by High Court lawyer June Choudhry, a nominated legislator, has done a commendable job by bringing out the facts. The committee has recommended action against, among others, Surendra Kumar Pandey, who was the superintendent of police (SP) at Ambikapur.

"As far as the role of the SP is concerned," says the report, "it cannot be said satisfactory. He did not reach the spot on



WATCHFUL EYES: a policeman working inside the temple; (inset) the condemned lock-up

inside the court premises, has no other option but to double up as the lock-up. And this has been going on for the past 18 months, with the authorities refusing to take notice.

The cops may have found solace in the divine presence; but the prisoners remain unmoved. On 23 July, after a prisoner called Munna Yadav was produced in court, he managed to flee after slapping a police constable.

Munna was booked for a motor-vehicle-related offence and had come to the court to surrender. During an earlier appearance, the court had rejected his bail plea. But as the court in question did not have a lock-up, Munna was being taken to the prison van so that he could be transferred to some other lock-up. Munna, however, realised that escape was a more viable option than waiting for bail. He did just that, and till date, the fugitive remains untraced.

Munna's escape has once again brought out the helplessness of the police in the state. Poorly equipped and poorly paid, they are now treated poorly even by the prisoners.

Pradip Sanyal/Sarangpur

Cold cuts

Hera Pheri and Kinetic Mega Show fail to take off

There is something known as over-reaching, which means you've bitten off more than you can chew. This is especially true of a couple of newly-begun shows on Star; one of a purported sitcom, and the other, a celebrity show.

You'd have thought that Shekhar Suman is stretched too thin with all the scurrying he seems to do between his shows across the channels. You'd have thought that the pace with which he has to move and shake, five days a week, on Sony would leave him with little inclination to do anything else. You'd be wrong.

In *Hera Pheri*, (Tuesdays, 8 pm), Suman appears with Rakhi Vijan, the frizzy-haired scatterbrain of *Hum Paanch*, in a husband-wife act, which is supposed to leave you gasping because you're supposed to have been laughing.

Actually, it makes you want to tear your hair out of



OVEREXPOSED?: Shekhar Suman

Suman and Vijan, in a repeat of her frizzy-haired scatterbrain act, come up against a whole bunch of other people, including a cook and a chambermaid, and a heavy-breathing beauty who slinks about the apartment. And the result is an unfunny, soggy mess.

This could be reality check time for Shekhar Suman, the King Of Television. His *Movers and Shakers* seems to have run out of genuine celebrities. So he keeps presenting little-known types who aren't known for much, and falling all over himself at his own jokes.

An excessively painted Ruby Bhatia is anchoring something called a *Kinetic Mega Show* which is supposed to have filmi celebs sharing their innermost secrets. It's had Sushmita Sen who giggled as much as Ms Bhatia, and Sonali Bendre, who giggled a little less. Last fortnight, there was Saif Ali Khan who brought to the show some smarts, and a cricket bat which he swung about.

What's mega about this? •

time. He also did not take action to provide security to the witnesses and also provided misleading information to the Vidhan Sabha committee."

Incidentally, Priti's father, Ramlakhan Srivastava, had written a letter to the SP, regarding security arrangements to be made for the witnesses. "The SP first told the committee that the father of Priti did not write any letter to him and later he accepted that he did get such a letter," the report has pointed out.

The four boys accused of murdering Priti were Samarvijay Singh, Rajkumar, Javed and Ganesh Kashyap. They were all students of BA Part I and came from influential families. Sources in the police say that they were supporters of the Singhdeo family of Ambikapur who were former rulers of the erstwhile estate of Sarguja. T.S. Singhdeo, son of M.S. Singhdeo, is now chairman of Ambikapur municipality.

M.S. Singhdeo is a retired IAS officer while his wife, Devendra Kumari, was a former Congress minister. The family has considerable influence in the locality. According to the police, the four accused were close to T.S. Singhdeo who still enjoys considerable clout in the area.

According to Singhdeo, on the day of the incident, the father of Samarvijay Singh came to his residence and told him that the police were looking for his son and the jeep. "I told Ranvijay (the father) to get his son surrender before the police," the report says.

Eventually, after a phone call from the chief minister's secretary, all the four boys were arrested within two days of the incident. The most shocking part was the way the witnesses were terrorised. Nisha Thakur, an eyewitness, and her family were threatened with dire consequences.

Nisha's brother Unesh was running a hair-cutting saloon from a handcart in a market at Ambikapur. The cart was seized and removed in the name of an anti-encroachment drive. But it was the only thing which was removed from the market. Nisha did not turn up to give her evidence. Sunita Mishra, a student of BA final year, was another witness. Sunita's father runs a shop on a piece of land. Municipal authorities broke down the shop, saying that they had orders to do so from "above".

The FIR in the murder case was lodged by Tara Chand Sahu, a college clerk. Sahu later refused to recognise most of the accounts in the FIR. "It is strange," says Ramlakhan Srivastava. "Sahu is a neighbour of Samarvijay Singh," he adds.

The committee report goes on to observe: "The position of the district administration is unfortunate. Despite the cases of Nisha, Sunita and Sahu, the collector, the SP and other police officials continued to say in an orchestra that evidence was fearless and that they don't have any complaint of threat, terror or pressure. The fact remains that instead of acting on such complaints, the administration refused to accept that they received any such complaint."

Sources say that efforts are on to convert the case from 302 of IPC (murder) to 304(A) (accidental death). According to Priti's father, who lodged a complaint in this regard, a man known as Theodore John, who is a former revenue inspector, met Tilvanus Lakada, a senior advocate. During the meeting, John reportedly asked Lakada that he should ask Srivastava not to take interest in the case. "It is not a case of 302 but of 304 (A) and after pressure from Srivastava, the accused are in jail. We will do anything to release them and see them acquitted even if we have to purchase the witnesses." •

Deshdeep Saxena/Bhopal



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 15 AUGUST, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

Get a partner or a friend to keep an eye on your extravagances. You may however have a good time for a very small outlay, which will put the fox with the hens for those who envy your social life. Take advantage of all social opportunities. Carelessness in the home could mean trouble.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

Legal advice can be good. Don't be afraid to ask, if you are in doubt. Social life will only be worthwhile if you have an intelligent partner. As the week progresses, you may be less inclined to extend your social flings. Someone you meet at a party can bring back memories you would rather forget.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

A partnership can be fruitful. Doing a business on your own can be fine. Be careful when handling funds at your workplace. Keep personal funds away from those belonging to the fund and vice-versa. There can be a heavy demand on money. It may take the lively mind of a partner to work out a solution.

CANCER

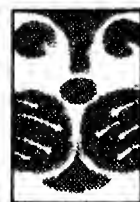
(21 June-20 July)

Business can be very successful. You should feel happy with the material end-product. But someone may not appreciate your position or could be envious of your success. This you will find hard to accept and may be deluded by the response you get.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

A parent will be blessed to see that you are making headway. You may be asked to invest some capital. Take the advice of someone at the top. Agents are not the right people so go directly to the top person if you want good, discreet service. Do something kind for someone who means a lot to you.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

You may be on your own. Initiative is needed but should be exercised with a little care. A reputation can suffer a heavy blow, so be careful to guard your own. You seem to be right out there to be shot at and there is little chance to back out. Be responsible for your own actions.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

Look for long-term benefits in all that you do. Something you have been unsure about may now finally be cleared up and settled. Persevere with what you have to do. Where others may give in, you should have the foresight to recognize the value of your priorities. A journey is on the cards.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

If there seems no hope of progress in a certain subject, leave it to stew. A journey with your nearest and dearest may be cancelled or there may be some sort of a hitch. Impatience can mar a relationship. You cannot be in two places at the same time and should make this clear to those who nag.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

Play second fiddle to no-one. Don't be a snob or think that you are the only one who matters. They say pride comes before a fall, but only a fool would throw a good reputation down the drain. Have your priorities right so that you can put others in their proper places, if they are rude to you.

PISCES

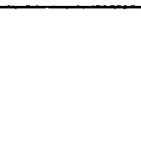
(21 February-20 March)

Keep in touch with business discreetly. You don't need to interfere, just put in an appearance when things are happening. A loved one may have to go off on a journey. Show your affection as you both could be feeling a bit down. Family support is genuine.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

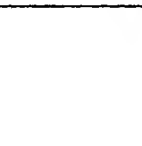
Shelve personal desires and share with friends. You need to get involved with people who do not wish to run your life for you. A parent or official may have something rather strong to say. Admit a mistake if you have made one, but don't be resentful.



SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

Feel confident that things are under control. Take a breather or lie low for a couple of days and adopt a wait and watch policy. A financial leader may have some discreet news for you. Past investigations may bring improvements in your own financial affairs.



Certain return

■ This piece of news should cheer up those who were down in the dumps about the finance minister's prospects of returning to the Lok Sabha from



PM Atal Behari Vajpayee: enjoying the prerogative

Hazaribagh, his Lok Sabha constituency in Bihar.

According to highly placed political sources in Bihar, Sinha is comfortably placed and is definitely going to be returned to the next Lok Sabha.

Obviously the prerogative of deciding who his finance minister will be rests with the PM. But Sinha will certainly be there standing tall among those who will take their oaths as MPs.

No tax

■ So much for all the controversy over the Kargil tax. At least two Cabinet ministers have confirmed to SUNDAY that the Kargil tax was never discussed in the Cabinet, and if there was

HEARD IN DELHI

If Harshad Mehta was involved in shares con, the PMO is involved in a tele con.

A CPI(M) ACTIVIST AT A MEETING

war has imposed on Budget assumptions. Then finance minister Yashwant Sinha clarified that the government would first monitor revenue collection and then decide whether a Kargil tax was needed at all.

In between there was heated debate on the availability of such a tax, and we were told that the PMO had locked horns with the finance ministry and that there had been heated exchanges bet-

ween the finance minister and the PMO.

In fact, nothing of the sort has happened. The matter was never discussed by the Cabinet and there will, in all probability, be no tax.

Small matter

■ Narcotics control organisations are angry that the Lok Sabha had time for everything but didn't have time to clear the Bill which provided for the confiscation of property of Indians engaged in the narcotics trade.

This is imperative because smugglers who are caught peddling narcotics have two advantages: in



Yashwant Sinha: dispelling fears

CHECK - LIST

The telecom issue: dividing every party

■ **The BJP:** There is a group in the BJP which believes that there are serious flaws in the PM's telecom proposal and is quietly telling the Congress to step up its attack

■ **The Congress:** Manmohan Singh is staying out of the telecom controversy on the plea that he knows the problem from up close and differs from his party. Exactly how, he won't say.

■ **The CPI(M):** Somnath Chatterjee's letter to the PM, seeking to help out the telecom groups pressurised to pay licence fees, is testimony enough that the party has more than one view on the matter.

India the punishment for smuggling 100 gm of a psychotropic substance (ranging from heroin to hashish) is the same as smuggling 50 kg — ten years imprisonment. And so smugglers are out having pleaded for a lower sentence, in two or three years.

When they come out, their property is still intact for them to return to. A law permitting the state to attach the property of these criminals is awaiting clearance from Parliament. Which doesn't have the time. •

Poor Opposition

■ Last week, when the Left Front announced its list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal, one thing was very clear. The Left leaders have accepted the fact that Mamata Banerjee is unstoppable and she will win her South Calcutta constituency once again with a huge margin.

With most of the seasoned CPI(M) leaders declining to contest against Mamata, the CPI(M) has nominated Rabindra Bharati University Vice-Chancellor Shubhan-



Mamata Banerjee: a confident candidate

kar Chakraborty, a green horn in politics, to take on one of the most celebrated Lok Sabha candidates of this elections.

But the CPI(M) is not the only outfit which is in a dilemma to find a suitable candidate against Mamata Banerjee. The Congress is also in a fix. Though they have announced candidates for the other seats, the South Calcutta seat has been kept vacant. The Congress is still searching for a candidate who is willing to forfeit his deposit in the polls.

HEARD IN CALCUTTA

Why not put Mani Shankar Aiyar's picture on the cover with the headline: "Can this man ever be elected?"

A SUB-EDITOR ON THE SUNDAY DESK AFTER THE LAST EPISODE OF MANI-TALK

Meanwhile, Mamata Banerjee said that her constituents are firmly behind her, so she would prefer to give more time to campaign for her other candidates. Surely she sounds confident.

recovering from such an operation are usually told not to move around too much. But for some reason, Dattatreya's doctor has given him the toughest prescription possible for a politician during election time: Don't Talk. Not just go slow on loud speeches, but don't utter a single word.

That's put the sitting MP in a tough spot. Secunderabad has traditionally been a tough constituency, where voters have forever seen-sawed between the Congress and the BJP. So Dattatreya has come up with the only alternative available to him:

Heart talk

■ It's going to be a most curious election campaign for BJP's Bandaru Dattatreya who is contesting to retain his Secunderabad Lok Sabha seat. The union minister of state for urban affairs underwent a heart surgery on 14 July. Patients

CHECK-LIST

Symbols we would like political parties to have: some suggestions

■ **Congress(I):** The election symbol should be a smiling man with a butter knife, because Congressmen are best known for sycophancy.

■ **BJP:** Bags of money, so that their voters are reminded, every time they see the BJP candidate's face, of all that money that was collected ostensibly to build the Ram Temple.

■ **Janata Dal:** This is a tricky one; the visual, whatever it is, should represent an optical illusion, because the Janata Dal pretends it is there, even though it doesn't exist.

■ **CPI(M):** How about a drowning man, shouting for help, in Italian?

■ **AIADMK:** A man with two knives — one to spread butter with and the other to stab in the back with.

■ **Samata Party:** A wreath. George Fernandes is defence minister and 400 people died in Kargil. Nitish Kumar was railway minister and 300 people died in Gaisal.

he writes letters.

Over 12,000 letters are being sent out to office-bearers of urban colonies, association, slum dwellers, union leaders and heads of religious and social organisations. He also carries with him a laminated paper and colour pencil when he wants to get up close and personal. "I suffered chest pain numerous times but I neglected it. I was vigorously moving. I had to undergo heart surgery that deprived me of nearly a month's service to you. But, by god's grace, I am fine now," the missive says to almost everyone.

What's more, we're told this dumb act will have to last exactly three weeks — till just after the elections are over. For frustrated BJP workers in the constituency, it sounds too bad to be true. As one of them put it, "Maybe his doctor is a secret Congress sympathiser." No offence meant to the doctor of course.

Sulicide seat

■ Poor Bangaru Laxman. The venerable BJP leader is so unpopular, that everyone wants him to lose the election.

The question was who would oppose the former BJP candidate Buta Singh in the Jalaur seat in Rajasthan. As it is a reserved seat, someone suggested it could be Bangaru Laxman. Like a flash the name went round: Bangaru Laxman for Jalaur.

Laxman may have been to Jaipur as a tourist, but even that is doubtful. Telugu in Rajasthan? What language would he campaign in? But Laxman has been sporting. He is saying he will contest the election only if Buta Singh is the candidate. If it is anyone else, he will back off.

Rock and Rolling Pin

■ Much grovelling has been devoted to pacifying the angry Sushma Swaraj over the last fortnight. Sushmaji — she of the angry tongue and rolling pin-wielding persona — believes that she has been badly treated by the BJP because the party refused to make her a Cabinet minister as a reward for losing the Delhi Assembly elections.

She has already said she won't stand for election but other nasty little surprises were also delivered to a shaky BJP leadership. First, her husband, the redoubtable Swaraj Kaushal who had been asked to negotiate with Naga rebels to no great avail decided to go public with criticism of the government and of the Prime Minister personally. Then, Sushmaji refused to appear on television on the BJP's behalf. The first excuse was half-way reasonable: she would be asked about Haryana and was unwilling to criticise Bansi Lal. But the second excuse was downright painful: she had a toothache and did not turn up for any of the television programmes where the BJP had committed her presence.

Apparently, Sushmaji's great mentor, L.K. Advani has been reluctant to intervene because he believes that she has been treated badly. (By that logic, Bhairon Singh should be Prime Minister because he managed to lose Rajasthan.) Unable to afford a crisis at this stage, the BJP decided to grovel and assorted emissaries have succeeded in pacifying the lady. Expect to see her and her rolling pin back in circulation.

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

We call it the Gillag archipelago.

AN ELECTION COMMISSION OFFICIAL ON THE VARIOUS SECURITY CLEARANCES AND BUREAUCRATIC TORTURES THEY HAVE TO GO THROUGH IN THE ELECTION COMMISSION

Good luck, next time

■ How many people ex-Prime Minister I.K. Gujral petitioned to ensure he got the Akali Dal's support for the Jalandhar seat?

Although he made a high-minded announcement that he was going to stay away from the elections this year because of the split in the Janata Dal (he couldn't decide which of the two Janata Dals he should side with, because both were so dear to him), the fact is that once Gujral realised the BJP was not going to support him, he turned tail and ran.

Gujral had to get the support of three sets of people to contest the Jalandhar seat.

One was the NDA leaders. The second were the Akali Dal and the BJP. Ram Vilas Paswan was roped in to speak to the Akali Dal on Gujral's behalf. George Fernandes interceded (reluctantly, according to sources) and even got an okay from Prakash Singh Badal (again reluctantly, because the Dal promised that seat to the widow of former Governor Darbara Singh some time ago).

But Gujral wanted the NDA to also speak to the BJP. When the BJP said it would not be possible to help Gujral out this time (he won the last time around only because the BJP worked in his favour in the last elections), Gujral decided it

CHECK-LIST

Prospective Prime Ministers and their constituencies

■ **Atal Behari Vajpayee:** Is comfortably placed in Lucknow and may visit his constituency just twice before the elections.

■ **Sonia Gandhi:** Hasn't indicated where she will contest from, although has said she will contest the Lok Sabha elections. Probably Amethi, which is why Sanjay Singh who will be the candidate against her, is so keen to shift.

■ **Sharad Pawar:** Has been taking journalists to Baramati, his constituency to tell them what a splendid job he's done there. Will win his seat, though may find it hard to become PM.

■ **Jyoti Basu:** Is not contesting the Lok Sabha elections, but that didn't stop some PMs from becoming PMs.

■ **Manmohan Singh:** Is likely to contest the South Delhi seat which he may win because of his clean image.

wasn't worth his while to contest.

So possibly, the NDA is one seat short. But the BJP is not regretting its decision.

Caught unawares

■ Poor Atal Behari Vajpayee. He's spending all his time being made to respond to interviews he never gave.

First it was Kanhaiya Lal Nandan, the former editor of *Sarika*, a Hindi magazine. Nandan is an old acquaintance of the Prime Minister's and when he called on the PM, Vajpayee had an informal chat with him.

Imagine the PM's horror when he woke up the next day to see the conversation reproduced in print, including the parts where he had said the President was not being fair to him!



A.B. Vajpayee: shocked

And now *Rashtriya Sahara* magazine, in its August 1999 issue, has come out with an interview of the PM, luridly entitled "True Confessions" with 30 questions which the PM has supposedly answered. It is headlined: "I sometimes feel I have wasted my life...I'm misfit in the present system...India is going down."

This interview was given to a correspondent in 1993. It has been reproduced as if it has been conducted now. The PMO is absolutely furious. And *Rashtriya Sahara* is one publication which will never get an interview with Atal Behari Vajpayee. *



**THEY DIDN'T GO DOWN
FIGHTING FOR
THEIR LIVES IN KARGIL,
BUT FOR OURS.**

• Squadron Leader Ajay Ahuja • Flight Lieutenant S. Muhilan • Sergeant PVNR Prasad • Squadron Leader Rajiv Pundir • Sergeant Raj Kishore Sahu • Naib Subedar Lal Chand • Havaladar Khazan Singh • Major Rajesh S. Adhikari • Deputy Commandant Sukhbir Singh Yadav • Lance Naik Hera Singh • Sipahi Gangching Konyak • Lance Naik Rakesh Chand • Subedar Lal Singh • Havaladar Surender Singh • Major Mariappan Saravanan • Lance Havaladar Samandar Singh Hooda • Lance Havaladar Ramkumar • Captain P.V. Vikram • Lieutenant Colonel Viswanathan • Squadron Leader Ojha • Sepoy Bajinder Singh • Jawan Arvind Kumar Pandey • Naik Siv Basaya • Major Kamlesh Prasad.....

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SUNDAY



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GEORGE FERNANDES



RAM VILAS PASWAN



RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE

THE HEADACHE

Assertive allies band together and pose serious problems for the health of the BJP

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We've made the world a little smaller to help make your business big.



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Uttarpara Jaikrishna Public Library

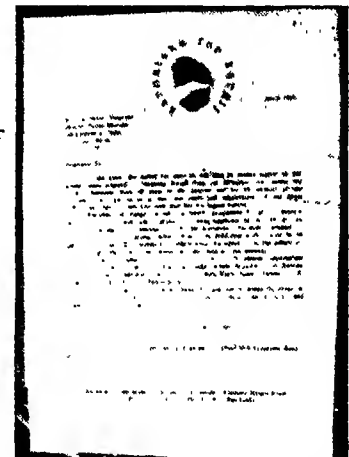
The headache

Assertive allies band together and pose serious problems for the health of the BJP

FOCUS 28

You've got mail

Address: The Prime Minister of India, New Delhi



ENVIRONMENT 30

Choking of plastic

Before packing your food in polythene carry bags, make sure you know where they are coming from



Politicising Kargil

This refers to the cover story *To the polls! To the polls!* (8—14 August). Now that the Kargil conflict is temporarily resolved, politicians of all hues are going all-out to prepare themselves for the exams called Lok Sabha elections.

True, from Kargil to Kanyakumari and from the secession-threatened Naga hills to the sands of Rajasthan, India is getting ready to vote with a vengeance. Much as the people are against Kargil being politicised, few doubt that Kargil will be the main issue in the coming polls.



Sonia Gandhi: presides over a confused party

While the BJP and its alliance are planning some Kargil hardshell through its national agenda to hit the jackpot, the Congress, on the other hand, makes sure that the BJP hems and haws on certain questions like when exactly the Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee got to know of the intrusion and the possible intelligence failure.

Kanchan Dutta, Siliguri (West Bengal)

■ Now that the Kargil crisis is over, the focus is shifted to the elections. While the BJP is basking in the glow of a political and military achievement, the Congress is a trifle confused. In the absence of a definite strategy, Congress' criticism of the war—ill-timed, in bad taste and for a doubtful purpose—will boomerang.

The Congress leaders justify their criticism saying that had it not been for the criminal negligence of the Vajpayee government, the Pakistanis would never have secured the ridges and so many Indian soldiers wouldn't have died. But bringing this up now shows an incredible lack of insensitivity to the feelings of the bereaved.

Sonia's limited interaction with the outside world makes her a prisoner of her coterie. And she finds it difficult to come to terms with a chaotic and divisive party.

Kiran Kumar, Bilaspur (Madhya Pradesh)

Breaking the ice

The writer has gone a little overboard in hailing Jaswant Singh's China visit and the warmth he has created in the Indo-China relations (*Chopstick diplomacy*,



Jaswant Singh: deft diplomacy

4—10 July). Relations with China must improve. And there are no two options in that respect. And Jaswant Singh's visit has succeeded in breaking the ice in Sino-Indian relations in the wake of Pokhran nuclear tests.

But it will be a mistake to read too much and say that China is not a threat to India. After all, China continues to aid Pakistan's nuclear and missile programmes and is still in occupation of a vast chunk of Indian territory since 1962. Then why China has taken a neutral stand and not a pro-Pakistan one on the Kargil issue? The reasons are not far to seek. China fears that if Kargil is not solved, the US will chalk out a role for itself to meddle in the affairs of south-east Asia.

If the NATO could intrude into Kosovo in the name of human rights, China fears the US may indulge in adven-

tures with it too in distant future. Also, Pakistan-trained Islamic fundamentalists are creating problems for China in its border areas where Muslims live in good numbers. Thus Islamic fundamentalism nurtured by Pakistan is a threat to China also.

Kalyani, Srirangam (Tamil Nadu)

The wrong quote

This refers to the story *Living with the Naxals* (13—19 June). In the excerpts of the interview, I was quoted as saying "...He asks us to surrender and at the same time demands more funds from the Centre to fight us..." This is completely incorrect because the question of a surrender offer and our response did not come up in my discussions with your correspondent in Bastar and this is a wrong presentation of our party's views on this issue. What we, in fact, discussed was chief minister Digvijay Singh's offer of talks soon after he was elected for a second term last December.

There is a world of difference between a surrender offer and an offer of talks or negotiations and this seems to have been overlooked by your correspondent. A surrender offer is made to a defeated party. Our party would never consider an offer of surrender since it means accepting defeat and giving up our entire struggle as well as our arms. Besides, we have expanded and strengthened our forces and support among the people ever since we launched guerrilla struggle almost two decades ago, in the face of a relentless campaign of suppression and extermination by the state.

On the other hand, talks and negotiations are commonplace between two warring

ing groups, without having to give up arms, territory and political aims. And our party has never closed the door to talks with the government on specific issues provided they are held in a cordial atmosphere. We are convinced that the cause of Indian people's misery is the rule of imperialism, the bourgeoisie and the feudal forces. And they are the enemies of the people who have to be got rid of to liberate the people. For this, the people need their own armed strength.

Our experience has proved the correctness of this line. We are ready for talks with the MP government on specific issues on the conditions laid down by our secretary Bhupathi, but this has nothing to do with surrender.

Lachanna, member, secretariat, DKSZC, CPI(ML)-PW

Rising to the occasion

Despite the intelligence failure, Prime Minister Vajpayee has more than made up for it by rising to the occasion and leading the country to victory — both militarily and diplomatically during the Kargil crisis (*Can this man be defeated?* 25—31 July). India has been fortunate indeed that a man of his stature has been at the helm of affairs during the crisis. Exhibiting tremendous restraint even under great provocation, Vajpayee has done India proud in handling the Kargil conflict. His clean image has stood him in good stead.

In retrospect, Vajpayee's political coup was his diplomatic victory and this began with his taking the initiative to run a cross-border bus service, which in actuality, set the pace for the world accepting him as a man of peace and also enabled him to win over the moderates in



Atal Behari Vajpayee: the new icon

Pakistan. By resisting the great temptation of gaining electoral mileage out of the issue, Vajpayee underplayed the victory and has thereby prepared a congenial ground for pursuing bilateral Indo-Pak talks through the Lahore process.

Vajpayee's secular credentials is what endeared him to the people of India and the hardliners in the party must realise that his immense popularity is due to his tolerant image. If the BJP hopes to win a clear majority, the party should be pre-

pared to shed their image of being Hindu religious fundamentalists and adopt a more tolerant, secular stand. Getting more people from different religions into their fold would be a right step in this direction.

Nalini Sudhakaran, Trivandrum (Kerala)

■ The story on the newly-acquired stature of Atal Behari Vajpayee, conclusively proves the maxim: Nothing succeeds like success and nothing fails like failure.

There is no doubt that BJP would go all-out to take political mileage riding on the crest of the post-Kargil charisma of Vajpayee. The way Vajpayee has handled the Kargil crisis has turned even his greatest critics into admirers. He has become a new icon of free India.

V. Sagar, New Delhi

Right choice

There is no gainsaying the fact that Sachin Tendulkar has indisputable talent (*Sachin: the scene-stealer*, 8—14 August). With Sachin at the helm, Indian cricket team will be immensely benefitted. He can inspire his teammates and is capable of instilling confidence into his colleagues which is badly needed after the World Cup debacle.

But with a timid team and an inefficient system, Sachin's task will be twice as tough.

Shyamal Gupta, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Political mileage

Benazir Bhutto's pro-people straight talk apparently fashioned out of the fragile post-Kargil situation in Pakistan seems to be aimed at providing her with the much-needed political mileage (*Benazir Bhutto*, 1—7 August).

Former Pakistani Prime Minister may have succeeded in showing the murky Pakistan politics in its true colours, but the rosy picture that her words intended to paint, seems dubious. The bottomline is if the leaders of Pakistan learn to give more weightage to genuine development in the country, it would go a long way in mending not only Pakistan's position vis-a-vis South-Asia but also strengthening their own position politically.

Vanshree Agarwal, New Delhi

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Contributed by Nilima Banerjee, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

DIED: Rammath Parker, former Test opener, on 11 August, in Bombay. He was 52.

RULED: by a four-judge constitution Bench of the Supreme Court that merit alone can be the basis of selection of candidates for admission to super-speciality courses in medicines and engineering.

BANNED: Amar Meyebela, Taslima Nasreen's latest novel, by the Bangladeshi government, because "its contents might hurt



existing social systems and religious sentiments of the people".

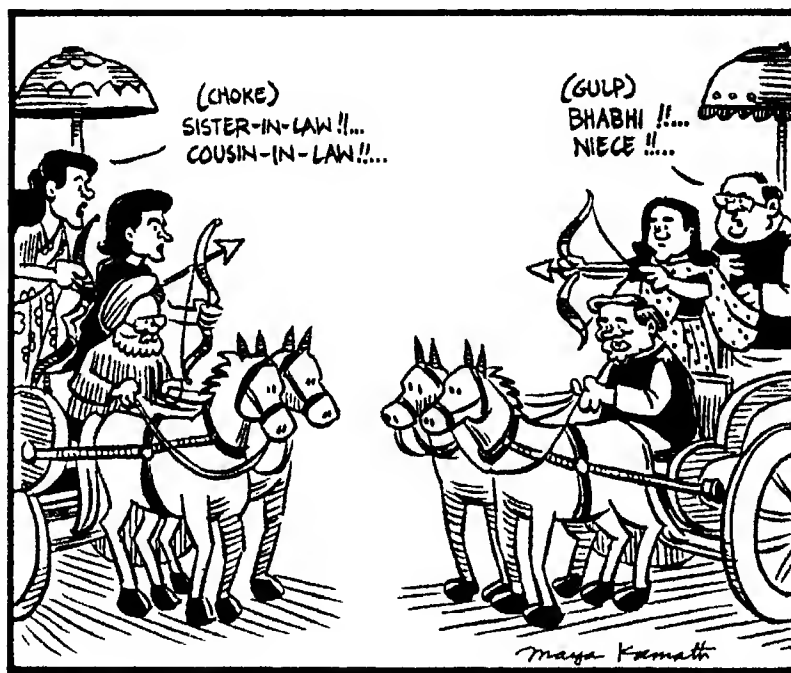
BANNED: smoking on board all Air India flights, barring those to the Gulf, Hong Kong and Japan, from 15 August.

AWARDED: to Nirmal Brahmachari, the Foreign Writers' Award of Norway, for his book of poems *Sparks In The Snow*. He is the first Indian to receive this award.

SELECTED: Jyotirmoyee Sikdar, athlete, for the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award, for her performance in the Bangkok Asian Games.

SIGNED: by Bhaichung Bhutia, footballer, a three-year contract with English second-division club Bury FC.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH: THE ASIAN AGE

■ The country cannot afford to have a caretaker government at the Centre at this stage when the enemy is out to have a cold war or warm war, whatever you call it, a war.

BAL THACKERAY *Shiv Sena chief*

■ We will take revenge in occupied Kashmir in a way that will be remembered by India for years.

SYED SAIAHUDDIN, *supreme commander of the Hizbul Mujahideen*

■ The presence of ISI and their agents in this region is not new. We have, on many occasions, drawn the Union government's attention to this development.

S. C. JAMIR, *Nagaland chief minister*



■ We are not on the brink of a war. I don't visualise any threat from Pakistan...but we are prepared to face any problem.

GEORGE FERNANDES *defence minister*

■ Mr Jyoti Basu is a de facto PCC president and should be called a Marxist (Congress) leader.

MAMATA BANERJEE, *Trinamul Congress leader*

■ At the moment, the country doesn't have enough players of international level to have two teams (for Tests and One-Days) like Australia.

ANSHUMAN GAEKWAD, *Indian cricket coach*

■ Everyone is a commodity out here. Whoever sells the most is loved the most.

SUSHMITA SEN, *film star*

SEEN

This time it's all on the record

Sonia Gandhi's first press conference



YES, MADAM?: Sonia Gandhi with Anil Shastri at the press conference

First came the *chamchas*. They may hold fancy titles such as the chairman of the publicity committee, chairman of the manifesto committee, general secretary and party spokesperson, but at the end of the day, they were no better than the ordinary Seva Dal worker as they ran around looking for a flag to drape the podium with or hunted for a cassette of *Vande Mataram* to play at the beginning of the function. And then, positioned themselves near the stage so that Madam could see them when she walked in.

In fact, even members of the party's highest decision-making body — the working committee — made sure that they arrived 15 minutes early, so that they could get prime seats in the first row, all the better to be seen!

After all, Sonia Gandhi was coming to the AICC to release the party's manifesto, and each wanted to make his presence felt. Shivraj Patil, Anil Shastri and Oscar Fernandes were the first to arrive. They spent the time directing the placement of chairs, skipping nimbly under the ropes as they scurried to and fro — checking the mikes et al.

Another early arrival was Dr Manmohan Singh (he later joined Sonia on the podium and kick-started his personal poll campaign by giving an economics-heavy speech that would go down well with the middle class of South Delhi, but bored the rest of us). Pranab Mukherjee, however, was there before him. He thumbed anxiously through the manifesto while waiting for Sonia — probably looking for a last-minute spelling 'mishtake'. Next to him stood Kapil Sibal. And at

some distance away stood Kamal Nath.

Finally, the event that Congressmen were waiting for happened. No, not the release of the manifesto but Sonia Gandhi's arrival. Someone had the brainwave to kick-start the function with *Vande Mataram*, for that gave Congressmen a face-saving excuse for struggling to their feet when their leader walked in.

The party president then released the manifesto (there's even an Urdu edition of it — so, that makes it one more than the BJP) and ended her speech by saying that all those on the dais would now answer questions. And said with a knowing laugh, "including myself".

And so began Sonia's first press conference.

Unfortunately for the Congress president, her own men have little faith in her ability to handle uncomfortable situations. Interrupting the journalist who had begun asking the first question, party spokesperson Anil Shastri declared from his vantage point on the podium, "I will call out the names of the persons who will ask the questions."

This led to a great deal of outrage and accusations of the press conference having been 'doctored'. It was probably then that Sonia realised that the event was going to boomerang very badly — and took charge. She proceeded to answer all the questions fielded to her, regardless of the fact whether Shastri called out their names or not.

Sonia doesn't have a problem facing the media, but what does she do about overzealous *chamchas*? •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

... her own men have uncomfortable situations

No peace in sight

Pakistan provokes an escalation of tension



Something like the shooting down of a Pakistani marine reconnaissance aircraft was waiting to happen. What is more, let no one be under any illusion that the problem will not recur. It is possible that those in Islamabad who mouthed the spying operation did not foresee the fate the Atlantique aircraft will meet. After all, they had managed to get away with eight earlier intrusions in the same area.

The core reality, however, is that Pakistan is hell-bent on upping the ante with India and there is going to be no let-up in this dangerous determination. The reasons are not far to seek.

Pakistan, as a state, has been not only wounded but also

ing behaved with unpardonable recklessness and then caved in abjectly.

To keep up the tension with India and to up the ante without risking an all-out war, is the best possible strategy Pakistan's beleaguered regime, civilian and military, can adopt. Such a course has an added advantage for the rulers of Pakistan. Since the revival of the Lahore process will be impossible in the midst of tension and provocations, Islamabad can go on a diplomatic offensive, complaining of "Indian intransigence". It can also hope that this time around, the US will back Pakistan, rather than India. Especially if the frightening vision of a "nuclear exchange" is conjured up from time to time.

It is in this context that the first comments of the official spokesman of the US state department, James Rubin, should be kept in mind. Rubin was very particular about remaining neutral on the question whether the Pakistani plane was shot down over the Indian or Pakistani territory. He also stuck to the suggestion that the talks between the two neighbours be resumed as early as possible. And, of course, he repeatedly called for "restraint on both sides".

There need be no mystery about the phenomenon of the wreckage of the spy plane falling on both sides of the border area the Pakistani Atlantique was snooping around. Distances being small and the aircraft flying at very high speed, this kind of thing usually happens. However, it seems that the bodies of five officers and all other personnel in the aircraft have fallen on the Pakistani side. If it was a "routine" training flight, as the high-powered Pakistani propagandists are blandly claiming, what on earth were five "senior officers" doing in the aircraft, equipped with the most sophisticated spy equipment?

The honest answer to the question is that the Pakistani armed forces are in search of vulnerable Indian spots to take some action, if it becomes necessary, to mollify the Pakistanis who felt "betrayed" by Sharif's pusillanimity. It should be no surprise that their choice fell on the marshes of Kutch which had come in very handy as a prelude to the 1965 war, too.

Incidentally, Pakistan had only three French-built Atlantique aircraft. One of these has now been knocked down. This is a serious loss for Islamabad, not easily replaceable. In other respects also the Pakistani position is equally precarious.

In respect of the information war, however, Pakistanis outclass their lackadaisical and complacent opposite numbers here. Once again, Pakistan was the first to publicise the news and twisting it to its advantage. Almost immediately the Pakistani information minister, Mushahid Hussain, was on the BBC to shed tears over India's "wanton aggression on an unarmed aircraft within Pakistani territory".

By contrast, the only thing the BBC could get from New Delhi was a bald statement from the "Indian armed forces". It was hours after Hussain, Sartaj Aziz and other Pakistanis had their say that George Fernandes made a brief appearance on telly screens. •



Pakistani armed forces are in search of vulnerable Indian spots to take some action, if it becomes necessary, to mollify the Pakistanis who felt "betrayed" by Sharif's pusillanimity

humiliated by its foolhardy Kargil misadventure. Nawaz Sharif, until only the other day the most powerful Pak PM since Zulfikar Ali Bhutto during his heyday, finds himself driven to the wall.

At home he is under attack from both sides. From the rabid Islamists, with close links with the army, for having "betrayed" and "back-stabbed" the Kargil "Mujahideen", a laughable euphemism for the regular soldiers out of uniform. And from the liberal and basically sound Pakistanis, for hav-



The PM being welcomed in Lucknow: expectations belied

Lesson from Lucknow

If Congressmen failed to capitalise on the Bollywood giant Dilip Kumar's presence as the party's star campaigner, the Bharatiya Janata Party, too, chose not to lag too far behind in cashing in on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's public rally last fortnight at Lucknow.

But just as Congressmen failed to rise to the occasion and make efforts to mobilise crowds for Dilip Kumar's public meeting, the BJP bigwigs in UP remained complacent and could not ensure a decent gathering at the first election rally of their most popular leader.

The historic Begum Hazrat Mahal Park, where Vajpayee has pulled huge crowds on many occasions in the past, looked half-empty as the Prime Minister

Vajpayee's rally in his home constituency shows that the BJP should not sit back in complacency

rode on to the impressively decorated podium.

Very much in line with the Congressmen, who deferred Dilip Kumar's arrival until it got dark so that he could not get an idea of the thin attendance, the BJP bosses, too, made it a point to keep Vajpayee away until the glare of halogens could be focused towards the pod-

ium — keeping Vajpayee blind to the ground reality.

Sure enough, Vajpayee's rally remained a damp squib — leaving the campaign managers high and dry. Whether it had to do with the ongoing infighting in the party is not known. But the fact remains that this was the poorest ever rally of the BJP veteran in his home constituency. It was no better than his contender to the Prime Minister's throne, Sonia Gandhi's first election rally at Varanasi last month.

Not only did the organisers not bother to spread the word around that Vajpayee would address the meeting at the local park, but they also concealed from the Prime Minister that the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court had

imposed a ban on political rallies in that park on all weekdays.

After this violation of the court order was reported in the media, the saffron satraps managed to convince Vajpayee that since the rally was in the nature of a civic reception in recognition of his

"That was also the reason why so many people did not turn up. After all, this was not a political rally but a civic function organised by the Nagar Nigam." The *neta*, known to be close to Vajpayee and involved in putting up the show, claimed, "You will see how crowds swarm

ones in the past, he pointed out, "This was the first time that India did not concede an inch of land to the enemy — unlike the past wars when each time India lost some bit of land." But even this failed to evoke a befitting applause from the audience.



While Vajpayee was trying to capitalise on the Kargil "victory", UP chief minister Kalyan Singh was focusing on his latest fad: decentralisation of power to the grass-roots level

grand success at Kargil, it did not amount to contempt of court. So, when he was confronted with a query at a press conference before the rally, Vajpayee promptly retorted, "Well, the position has been fully clarified and there is no violation."

Later, a senior BJP leader said, "You see, we are not novices; we had discreetly selected the date — 9 August, the Quit India Day." Another leader quipped,

when we organise his political rallies "

On his part, Vajpayee took the opportunity to focus on Kargil. Of course, the stress remained on how he was responsible for ensuring India's victory. He took off on an emotional note. "I had gone to Lahore with a message of peace, but what I received in return was betrayal."

To drive home the point that his war against Pakistan was different from the

Earlier during the day, at a press conference, the Prime Minister made it clear that those guilty of lapses that led to the situation in Kargil would soon be taken to task. He said that "the probe panel set up by the government will also go into the intelligence failure", unwittingly contradicting defence minister George Fernandes' observation that the terms of reference of the enquiry did not have anything to do with "intelligence failure"

For the benefit of the morale of the forces, he narrated how widows of several Kargil martyrs had reacted at the funeral of their spouses. "I was really touched to find a widow telling mourners not to weep as tears were not meant for paying homage to martyrs," he remarked, adding, "it left me with a mixed sense of pride and sorrow"

With the entire speech devoted to Kargil, Vajpayee made it clear that the "warlike situation" with Pakistan would remain the BJP's mainstay at the coming elections. If the Opposition was training its guns on the BJP by terming Kargil as a black spot in the Vajpayee government's report card, here was the Prime Minister terming Kargil as one of the key achievements of his government.

Apparently, the BJP leadership had divided the roles of national and state-level leaders engaged in the campaign. While Vajpayee was trying to capitalise on the Kargil "victory", Uttar Pradesh chief minister Kalyan Singh was focusing on his latest fad — decentralisation of power to the grass-roots level.

Vajpayee has before him a hectic schedule. He is to address two rallies shortly in Varanasi and Kanpur — the two major political sectors where the party faces stiff challenge from a strong albeit divided Opposition.

Of course, having learnt their lesson in Lucknow, the rally managers are bound to be more careful and painstaking — and least of all, not to sit back complacently in the hope that crowds will automatically get magnetised in the name of the party's star campaigner Atal Behari Vajpayee. •

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow

Testing time

The Muslim mood in UP is changing. But will it translate into votes for the Congress?

Beniabagh is one place in Benares where for centuries Hinduism and Islam have jostled for physical and spiritual space. The believers of the two faiths, on the contrary, have found ample good sense in cohabiting peacefully and thus maximising their last rupee. It is this desirable contradiction between faiths and practices that has influenced politics and culture.

Therefore, it was not surprising that Sonia Gandhi chose to address her meeting here in 1998. The calculations of her handlers were that if Sonia made an impact here, she would have little problems with the bigots of either Hinduism or Islam.

Her public meeting by any reckoning was unprecedented. Members of the minority community safely outnumbered others. Many of them came not to see the Nehru-Gandhi family in its new Italian avatar, but to feel for themselves whether she had it in her to protect their cause. Upper caste Hindus came to find out whether she could recapture the old magic.

It was apparent that the audience was looking more at her as a future bet. "We came to see her not for this election but for the next one," enlightened a minority schoolteacher. Not unexpectedly the Congress sank without a trace. Huge crowds but no votes.

The same story was repeated in other parts of Uttar Pradesh. The Congress barely managed six per cent votes. The minorities, for whose support the Congress had been pining for since the fateful day when its government granted permission for *shilanyas* at Ayodhya, refused to oblige. They gave their full backing to the Samajwadi Party and Mulayam Singh Yadav. Even the Bahujan Samaj Party put up a decent show.

But 1998 provided enough evidence that the electoral choices of the minorities were transitory. Whether in Ghosi, Gorakhpur or Gonda on the one hand, or Allahabad, Amroha or Aonla on the



Entry of Sonia Gandhi in politics holds out a promise for the beleaguered minorities. They hope for a return of the old order, where an enlightened dynasty looked after the interest of the subjects

other, Muslims had begun to betray unease with the Mulayam brand of aggressive minorityism. Everywhere the refrain was, "Next time Sonia." Her foreign birth, her inexperience, her incomprehensible accent and her aloofness were not held against her at all.

The Congress president and her strategists also wove their electoral strategy around the expected minority support. Thus, Salman Khurshid was appointed UPCC president. The reasoning was that if the minorities — with about 12-15 per cent population — could extend support to the Congress, they could help the party recover its lost glory.

The minorities, too, realised that their political clout could only reveal itself when they supported a party like the Congress. "The steady decline of the Congress, in reality, has diminished the value of the 'Muslim vote'," claims Professor Mushirul Hasan.

All these factors contributed in building a climate of opinion in favour of the Congress. In 1999, the circumstances in which Mulayam put a spoke in the ambitions of Sonia Gandhi to form the government was resented by the minorities. They did not want the BJP government to continue.

Before hostilities began at Kargil, the Congress seemed resurgent enough to stop the BJP from coming to power at the Centre. The calculation was that the Congress would get the support of the minorities and the upper castes who were angry with Kalyan Singh for ignoring their interest. If the BJP could be stopped in UP, it would not be able to form government in Delhi.

The "almost war" with Pakistan may have changed the way people perceive politics. A recent trip to some parts of the state clearly shows how Kargil has affected the psyche of the Hindus and Muslims. Interestingly, they are totally at variance.

The Hindu middle class gave an impression of being totally in love with the BJP for the manner in which Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee managed to get Indian territory vacated from invaders.

Because of its anti-Islamic and jingoistic symbolism, Kargil provided an opportunity to the *sangh parivar* to bring about communal consolidation. Its cause was further buttressed by Western fears about global Islamic militancy.

Kargil also allowed the *sangh parivar*

to lay down the yardstick of loyalty. Body bags helped to whip up nationalistic sentiments. In many cases nationalism was shown to be synonymous with Hinduism.

Film star Dilip Kumar was pressured to give up a Pakistani award, Nishan-e-Imtiaz, till Prime Minister Vajpayee bailed him out. Maulana Ali Mian, the rector of an Islamic university at Lucknow, was asked to apologise for something that he claimed he had not stated. All this contributed in feeding minority fears. "We have been forced to prove our loyalty under duress," claimed Nihaluddin, part-time politician and full-time bank employee.

Harassed by history and circumstances, Muslims drew comfort from the sacrifice of some of the Muslim soldiers

in Kargil. Opinion makers like Sajjad Nomani in Lucknow are at pains to tell everyone that 19 Muslim soldiers lost their lives from UP alone. There are others who have participated in demonstrations against Pakistan. "It is pathetic to watch people desperately trying to prove their loyalty. It is an evidence of their defensiveness," explains Muslim leader and editor of *Muslim India*, Syed Shahabuddin.

Happenings in Kargil have led to greater receptiveness amongst the minorities for the Congress's criticism of the government and about the intelligence failure. Nomani, leader of the Milli council, feels that there is more to Kargil than meets the eye.

The so-called communal divide on what constitutes the truth about Kargil



The circumstances in which Mulayam Singh Yadav put a spoke in the ambitions of Sonia Gandhi to form the government was resented by the minorities. They did not want the BJP government to continue

would certainly reveal itself during the elections. For the first time since the demolition of the Babri Masjid the minorities are aggressively talking of the Congress.

But sentiments normally do not square with the way the Muslims have been voting in the past ten years. Their efforts largely have been to find a party that can defeat the BJP. If the support base of the Congress is anything to go by — Sonia's presence notwithstanding — then it should not inspire confidence.

As of now it has neither the Brahmins nor the Scheduled Castes. Over the years both these constituencies have crossed over to other parties. What if the Congress, in spite of an aggressive campaign by Sonia, fails to get the support of other castes and social groups? In those circumstances, many feel, the minority

vote will get scattered.

In different constituencies it would look for a candidate capable of winning against the BJP. It will vacillate between the BSP and the Congress. In some places it may still vote for Mulayam's party.

"Minorities are also looking at the BSP and the promise of forming a social coalition with the untouchables," expanded Shahabuddin. He claimed in an editorial that the BJP would use every trick in the trade to break the unity of the secular forces and scatter votes in Muslim-concentrated constituencies.

The Congress's collapse may have contributed in weakening the Muslim factor, but the real reason behind its progressive decline in importance is the growing communalisation of those com-

Entry of Sonia Gandhi in politics, for this reason, holds out a promise for the beleaguered minorities.

They hope for a return of the old order — where an enlightened dynasty looked after the interest of the subjects. But compromises with corrupt, criminal and communal elements have robbed the party of all the ideals of freedom struggle that it stood for. Committed workers, too, have deserted it.

At the ground level, it has been difficult to find anyone talking of the Congress. It neither attracts the young nor binds the old to its cause. For years it has been impossible for the party to have committed polling agents to innumerable booths in various parts of UP. Party leaders claim that all these years the minorities had been passionately doing this job

without asking for returns. For them democracy is not merely exercising their franchise but an intervention to protect their lives and livelihood.

But after they deserted the party there has been no one who had the vested interests to see whether votes were polled for the Congress. So, was it surprising to see so many Congress candidates losing their deposits? One sure sign of the Congress resurgence would be the number of election agents it can muster up on polling day.

However, Muslims feel comfortable supporting a party if that has its own support base. Besides protection from communal elements it also gives them a chance to articulate their views by getting representation in the Assembly or Parliament. Due to this they have backed from time to time a Yadav-based party like the SP and the party of the oppressed, the BSP.

It was due to these reasons that the Congress was very keen to have an alliance with the BSP. But dismal performance in the past plus the reluctance of BSP leader Mayawati spoiled the Congress's designs. The only alliance the Congress may have is with Ajit Singh's Lok Dal that could lead to a Jat-Muslim alliance in some of the seats of western UP.

Congress leaders also claim that the minority vote cannot become irrelevant if it decides to go en bloc. According to their thesis, in a low voter turnout the Muslim vote can make nonsense of all psephological predictions. This is particularly so if the fight is four-cornered or five-cornered — as it is likely to be in Uttar Pradesh.

These leaders assert that the minorities should not follow the strategy of searching for the candidate that can defeat the BJP. That would scatter their votes. On the contrary, a solid vote for the Congress, they claim, can ensure that it does not result in a communal backlash.

The BJP hopes to turn the post-Kargil nationalistic fervour to its advantage. Sonia Gandhi is in a dither how this will translate itself for her party.

About a month back when the Kargil crisis was at its peak, Sonia went to Beninabagh again. The place seemed frozen in time but with a difference. There were no crowds. Sonia, who once got a full house and no votes, would fervently hope that all those who saw her last year would come and vote for her this time. •

Sanjay Kapoor/Benares and Lucknow



munities that the minorities normally voted with. For example, the Muslims mostly voted together with the Brahmins and the Scheduled Castes. This is true of both the "upper caste" and "lower caste" Muslims who are bound with corresponding Hindu castes with shared customs.

Not only this relationship provides protection — that normally comes in numbers — but also gave minorities an opportunity to influence decision making by the secular ruling elite of an evolving Indian society. Fragmentation of the social coalition of the Congress left the minorities at the mercy of the unenlightened sections of the society that had little ideological stake in secularism. It is due to this reason that the dividing line between the secular and communal parties has got so blurred.

"It is pathetic to watch people desperately trying to prove their loyalty. It is an evidence of their defensiveness," explains Muslim leader and editor of *Muslim India*, Syed Shahabuddin

The headac

Assertive allies band together and pose serious problems for the health of the BJP

Atal Behari Vajpayee has faced many uncomfortable questions, but this was one he couldn't answer. During the release of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) manifesto, he was asked whether George Fernandes was present on the dais as a member of the Samata Party or the Janata Dal (United). Vajpayee tried to pass the buck. "I am not the one this question should be addressed to," he said.

Everyone then looked at Fernandes who was sitting on the Prime Minister's left. Fernandes, however, looked down and said nothing. Finally, it was Pramod Mahajan who saved the day. "He is here in his capacity as the convenor of the NDA. That's all," he said. Later, a BJP leader explained the predicament of his party: "*Kya karen? Nigalte nahin banta aur ugalta nahin banta* (What can we do? It is an alliance. We can neither spit our allies out, nor can we swallow them)."

For the BJP, all set to come to power on a Kargil-induced victory wave, the sudden — and undiscussed — decision of George Fernandes and Ramakrishna Hegde to include the Janata Dal in their alliance, came as a bolt from the blue. For the Karnataka and Bihar units, it was an unpleasant bolt. In Bangalore, for months they had worked to oust the J.H. Patel government. Now they were to fight side by side with them and actually aid their victory.

Little wonder then that on the day of the release of the manifesto of the NDA, Patel and Co. did not attend the meeting. And an hour after the manifesto was released, Ramakrishna Hegde, closeted in a closed-door meeting with Mahajan, Fernandes and Jaswant Singh, emerged looking downcast. "The trust which should be there [between allies] is not there," he said and left.

And this was the state of affairs on 16 August, days before the last date of withdrawals of the nominations for the 1999 elections.

TO THOSE WHO have been watching politics of and between the Janata Party/Janata Dal and the BJP, these hiccups

For Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, all set to come to power on a Kargil-induced victory wave, the sudden — and undiscussed — decision of George Fernandes and Ramakrishna Hegde to include the Janata Dal in their alliance came as a bolt from the blue

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GEORGE FERNANDES



RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE

SUNDAY 28 August 1994



The Trust Index

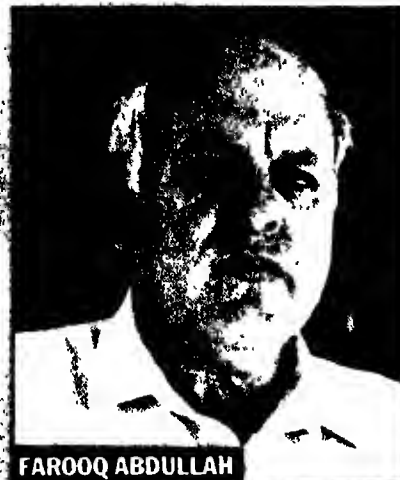
Whom the PM relies on in the NDA; and how much



MAMATA BANERJEE



M. KARUNANIDHI



FAROOQ ABDULLAH

On a scale of ten, who gets the maximum marks from Atal Behari Vajpayee on performance and trust — a check-list of some of the major allies:

George Fernandes: 6

Fernandes has never hidden the fact that he would have liked Prime Minister Vajpayee to be more assertive and tough — and has, time and again, told the PM this.

However, the PM has his own views on Fernandes' political opinions, especially his tendency to be 'habitually misquoted' on issues concerning the government. But Fernandes is a useful person to have around, particularly as he was responsible for bringing around the Janata Dal which would act as a counterpoise to the pressure of the *sangh parivar*.

Ramakrishna Hegde: 5

Ever since the Lok Shakti joined the BJP alliance, and vowed to stamp out the rule of the likes of H.D. Deve Gowda, Ramakrishna Hegde has been the PM's valuable ally. Although the commerce minister's performance has left much to be desired, he has been in control of the Lok Shakti and smoothened the path of the BJP, the bigger ally.

Now, however, the situation has slipped out of control. The BJP in Karnataka is worried at the prospect of a much bigger, stronger Lok Shakti than existed originally.

Mamata Banerjee: 6

Despite Banerjee's somewhat mercurial personality and temperament, Vajpayee finds her the easiest ally to deal with. She has managed to get a lot for her state, like the West Bengal Development Package, which has helped her expand the Trinamul Congress's base.

From the PM's point of view, this is just fine because it helps him in neutralising the *sangh* and other detractors.

Naveen Patnaik: 4

A.B. Vajpayee has nothing against Naveen Patnaik. But he does wish he would get his act together because repeated splits in the Biju Janata Dal reflect badly on the alliance. Patnaik, on the other hand, is struggling to get his party under control and would be much happier if the Bajrang Dal and the RSS carried out more massacres of Christian missionaries so that the Congress government in Orissa could then be blamed.

Farooq Abdullah: 4

This is the same man, who during the vote of confidence, went and met the Congress president. Although his party did vote with the BJP, there was no guarantee that the National Conference would stand by the BJP.

Abdullah represents the greatest feather in the BJP's crown: he is testimony to the secularism of Vajpayee. But he is also deeply unstable, tending to bend towards the winning side.

M. Karunanidhi: 6

The Prime Minister refused to sack the DMK government in Tamil Nadu even though the cumulative result was that he lost his government. Karunanidhi has repaid that in full measure. He has even made up with the one time enemy he had banished from his party, warning him never to return. V. Gopinath



are nothing new. Two sets of parties, till recently opposed to each other, suddenly doing a deal, is bound to have adverse ramifications. The problem, explained BJP strategists, was not so much with Bihar as with Karnataka. In Bihar, the state unit had agreed to accommodate the Janata Dal and others such as Anand Mohan Singh. But the crux of the problem was in Karnataka, where the state would be going in for polls, both at the Assembly and the Lok Sabha level: the BJP, the Lok Shakti and J.H. Patel's Janata Dal had their eye on the chief ministerial seat.

The central BJP leadership tried to persuade its state unit not to take such a short-sighted view of events. And cited the example of Goa. During the Assembly elections held in June, the Prime Minister was keen to forge an alliance with the Maharashtra Gomantak Party (MGP) in Goa. But the state unit was dead set against it. It argued that it was in a position to strengthen its hold on the state and so did not want to bog itself down with an alliance with the MGP.

The BJP did improve its tally in the state — it doubled its seats from four to eight. But that was the sum total of its achievements. It did not get to form the

L.K. Advani: RSS leaders acknowledge him as a better man to handle the question and agenda of the RSS. This issue has also occurred to the non-BJP allies in the coalition

government at the state level and also, in the process, it lost out a valuable ally at the national level. The MGP has tied up with the Congress, thus giving the Congress a sure seat from Ramakant Khalap's constituency.

At a time when one vote can make all the difference, Vajpayee saw this as a

Vajpayee knows what the fallout of the BJP securing near majority could be. He is more comfortable with non-BJP forces to balance his own party's strength. At this moment, the party is reconciled to having Vajpayee as Prime Minister

major loss. It was probably then that he decided to take matters into his own hands. His logic seems to be: give in now rather than beg for that seat later. After all, point out his advisers, during the vote of confidence the BJP went begging to Ram Vilas Paswan, Ambarish, L.K. Gujral and others for help. Then they were not obliged to support the BJP. It made sense to include them into the alliance at this stage rather than to beg for that vote later.

But it was not hard to understand the central and state-level BJP leaders' hysteria and fears. The possibility that the NDA would swamp the BJP and hijack its electoral gains is never far from the mind of a suspicious BJP leadership. The Karnataka unit argued this most forcefully. "Look at us," they said. "We had a chance of forming a government at the Centre. Now, with this irresponsible and short-sighted alliance, we have lost the chance to form a government in the state."

The central leadership argues that the BJP hadn't a hope in hell of forming a government in Karnataka. Instead now, at least the opposition to the Congress will be unified. And as to the fear of being swamped, during a meeting Pra-

Numbers Game

The size of the problem in Karnataka

Name of region: **BANGALORE**

Number of constituencies: 1 (Basvangudi)

Problem: The sitting MLA, Nanje Gowda, who was earlier with the BJP is contesting as an Independent. This constituency comprises primarily the educated urban middle class. The JD(U) is interested in Basvangudi as Nanje Gowda is an Independent and the constituency is 'free' for them. For the BJP, Basvangudi has an electoral profile tailor-made for them to win.

Name of region: **BANGALORE**

Number of constituencies: 1 (Uttarahalli)

Problem: This is one of the largest Assembly constituencies with over ten lakh voters. The BJP has renominated its sitting MLA. This has caused a lot of friction because the JD(U) has been eyeing this segment for a long time. The Assembly seat is crucial to win the Lok Sabha seat and the JD(U) is finding it difficult to let go.

Name of region: **BELGAUM**

Number of Assembly segments: 22

Problem: The entire district could give the BJP and the Janata Dal(U) some trouble since both are interested in the larger portion of the pie. The main bone of contention will be the constituencies outside the city. There is a larger concentration of Lingayats and backward castes which is being wooed by the Janata Dal(U), the Lok Shakti and the BJP. In a three-way split, guess who gains?

Name of region: **DHARWAD (NORTH AND SOUTH)**

Number of Assembly constituencies: 32

Problem: The Lok Shakti already has a presence there. The BJP is also eyeing the district, paradoxically since Dharwad (south) has a significant concentration of Muslims. The BJP wants to cash in on the polarisation of votes, basically to exploit the religious sentiment.

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore

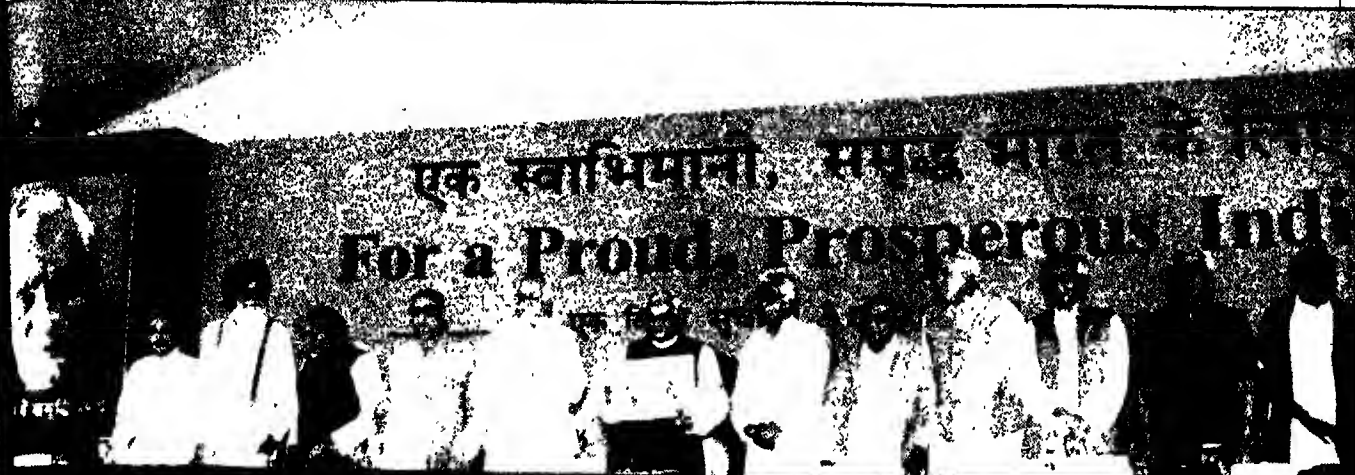


Yashwant Sinha: In Bihar, there is even a suggestion that if there is too much difference of opinion in the BJP about chief ministership, he could become a compromise choice

mod Mahajan made a valid point. He addressed the party's concern that an alliance between the Samata, the Janata Party and the Lok Shakti would strengthen the electoral performance of these parties and argued that while the alliance would help the Janata Dal(U), it would also help the BJP in the same proportion. Each side would benefit equally and at the end of the day, the total tally of the NDA's seats would increase.

The fact is the NDA will probably be strengthened by the inclusion of J H Patel and his cohorts. Its secular credentials will be underwritten more strongly. As putative Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee will be more secure both from the Opposition (in that his government will be more stable) and from his own party (so long as it is an alliance, the RSS cannot criticise Vajpayee for not carrying out its agenda).

But there are political problems in



में विजय दिलाये

this scenario as well. And that's what India has to watch out for.

"WE'VE SEEN THIS happen in 1977. The Jana Sangh, despite its greater ideological and organisational sacrifice, suffered more than others in the Janata Party, who had no ideological principles to speak of and were happy to go with Charan Singh later," a senior RSS leader told Vajpayee on the issue of broadcasting the NDA.

"In 1977," he explained to SUNDAY, "though our MPs numbered more than 90, there were just two ministers in the government from the Jana Sangh. No one bothered to press for the inclusion of anything from our manifesto in the Janata Party manifesto. After two decades, politics has come a full circle. Yet again, the BJP is thinking in terms of broader national unity, rather than party ideology and organisation. The only difference is: a formal merger has been avoided with the old Janata Party. But the faces — including those of the betrayers — are the same."

How deep the BJP's suspicions go is clear from the sequence of events. The 'inclusion' of the Janata Dal (Patel group) into the NDA was deliberately kept low key by the two major players who forged it — Hegde and Fernandes.

All the factions of the NDA accept the leadership of Vajpayee. In all circumstances, he would be the natural choice of the alliance for prime ministership. Vajpayee knows this and is keen to use this to his advantage

Their argument was that it was the NDA which was being strengthened — after all, no one from the NDA could object if the BJP decided to expand its base.

This development stirred up a lot of dust. Clearly, the NDA was beefing itself up, no matter who said what. Suddenly, the balance of power in the ruling coalition was being disturbed. Everyone scrambled to see how it would affect them.

Actually, the resistance to this development is maximum at the state and district level where actual sabotage against the newcomers — the Patel group — in Karnataka can't be ruled out. The BJP has never done this before. Usually sabotage is reserved for members of its own

party, so it will extend to allies for possibly the first time.

In Bihar, the other state where there is clash for seats, the problem is a little different. The number of seats a party will get in this general election will decide the ratio of seats it will contest in the Assembly elections to be held early next year. Obviously this will also decide who will be in a position to be a dominant partner — and chief minister. The focal unit of the BJP considers that in the forthcoming Assembly elections, the anti-incumbency and anti-Laloo factor would work to their tremendous advantage. So, for all the three Opposition players in Bihar — the BJP, the Janata Dal and the Samata Party — seat sharing in this Lok Sabha election will decide their fate in the forthcoming Assembly election.

For the BJP, a beefed-up Samata Party in Bihar — that is, Janata Dal and Samata — represents a real danger for the Assembly. Right now, Samata and Janata Dal are asking for just one Lok Sabha seat — Ram Vilas Paswan's. Sharan Yadav was the other candidate from Bihar (Madhepura) but he has opted out, and is likely to go to UP (Badayun) this time.

But the fact on the ground is that almost the whole Janata Party in Bihar



— such as it is — is knocking on the doors of the NDA. Could this adversely affect the chances of Karilashpati Mishra or Sushil Modi in becoming chief minister? Could it strengthen the claims of Samata's Nitish Kumar? There is even a suggestion that if there is too much difference of opinion in the BJP about chief ministership, Yashwant Sinha could become a compromise choice.

SO, AT THE district and state level, the inclusion of the Janata Dal means a major re-orientation for the BJP. However, the paradigm shift is more important.

This shift is represented by the simple question: who after Vajpayee?

All the factions of the NDA accept the leadership of Vajpayee. In all circumstances, he would be the natural choice of the alliance for prime ministership. Vajpayee knows this and is keen to use this to his advantage.

But if the BJP manages a majority on its own or is close to a majority on its own...? That's when L.K. Advani enters the picture.

RSS leaders acknowledge Advani as a better man to handle the question and agenda of the RSS. This issue has also occurred to the non-BJP allies in the coalition. So Fernandes' move is viewed with some suspicion by the RSS.

A hypothetical question has led to repolarisation among alliance partners

For the BJP, a beefed-up Samata Party in Bihar represents a real danger for the Assembly. Right now, Samata and JD are asking for just one Lok Sabha seat — Ram Vilas Paswan's. Sharad Yadav was the other candidate from Bihar (Madhepura) but he has opted out

Murli Manohar Joshi: wanted to be shifted from Allahabad to some other constituency; his request was flatly denied



and old friends. What if after the elections the Congress splits and agrees to join the NDA? Can Fernandes strike out on his own? What if the BJP performs spectacularly and the other allies are rendered superfluous? In that case, Vajpayee himself could find himself threatened.

Vajpayee knows what the fallout of the BJP securing near majority could be. He is more comfortable with non-BJP forces to balance his own party's strength. At this moment, the party is reconciled to having Vajpayee as Prime Minister. But with Advani taking the reins of the party in his hands, things are different. One recent manifestation of this was when HRD minister Dr Murli Manohar Joshi requested that he be shifted from Allahabad to some other constituency. His request was flatly denied — reportedly at the instance of party general secretary Govindacharya, known to be an Advani acolyte. The Advani group in the party is rearranging itself with a view to foiling the NDA's growth and development. This is clear from both their public and private postures.

In the circumstances, the NDA is a headache for the BJP just now. But, as time goes by, the headache could develop into a full-blown migraine. •

Priya Sahgal, Aditi Phadnis and Rajni Srinivasan/New Delhi with Anuja Joshi/Bangalore and Naved Zahir/Patna



PRIME MINISTER LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI WITH PRESIDENT AYUB KHAN



(FILE PICTURE) INDIAN TROOPS AT A FORWARD POST IN THE 1965 WAR

Kargil To Kutch

The downing of the Pak Atlantic aircraft on 9 August, 1999, has shifted the international focus from Kargil to Kutch. In 1965, it happened the other way round. World attention moved from Kutch to Kargil. Maj Gen. Akhtar Husain Malik, GOC Pak forces in PoK favoured a guerrilla operation across the ceasefire line (CFL) which had in the first two months of 1965 witnessed 1,345 violations of the ceasefire. President Ayub Khan was under increasing pressure from the hawks to act in J&K.

He planned to first gauge India's reaction by a minor Pakistani military operation in the Rann of Kutch, a desolate wasteland along the border between India's state of Gujarat and Pakistan's Sindh province. Pakistan had a tactical and logistic advantage on its side as it

The long march of insurgency

was served by better roads, the military cantonment Badin and airfields. This was a low-risk operation at the western extremity of the border where campaigning would be forced to end by the onset of the monsoons.

During January 1965, CRPF patrols noticed a 30-km long fresh track, two kms on the Indian side of the border in the Rann. Soon, Pak Rangers established a post at Kanjarkot forcing the CRPF to deploy 10 kms south-east to check further intrusions. Pakistan moved two brigades of 8 Infantry Divisions, under Maj. Gen. Tikka Khan (later Pakistan army chief) along with Patton tanks and artillery from Badin. India also moved

two brigades including 50 Para Brigade under an ad hoc sector commanded by Maj Gen. P.O. Dunn. The Indian side had no tanks.

On 24 April, 1965, 8 Pakistan Division launched attacks and captured three border posts around Chhad Bhet and two days later, the Bear Bhet posts. Neither side had used its air force. There were public demands in India for militarily removing Pakistan aggression from the Rann. For a variety of strategic reasons, Indian Army chief Gen. J.N. Chowdhury advised the government to deliver the riposte in Punjab, not a counter-attack in the Rann. His advice was accepted.

On 28 April, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri said in Parliament: "If Pakistan continues its aggressive activities, our army will decide its own strategy and employment of its manpower

and equipment in the manner which seems best."

The government ordered Op Ablaze and moved the army into its battle locations in Punjab in May. This deployment was to enforce restraint on Pakistan in the Rann and also be prepared for the Pakistani attacks in J&K and Punjab. Pakistan also carried out mobilisation of its forces. Consequent to Pakistan capturing Indian posts in the Rann, India captured three posts in Kargil including Point 13620.

The US and UK advised caution with the latter brokering a ceasefire on 29 April. Shastri and Ayub met in London during the Commonwealth PM's conference in June. A general agreement on demarcation of the Rann boundary through a binding arbitration was signed on 30 June. Both sides agreed to withdraw troops to the pre-Rann positions. The posts captured in Kargil had to be vacated. Foreign ministers of India and Pakistan were to meet on 20 August to consider final demarcation of boundary in the Rann. But Pakistan pre-empted this by large-scale infiltration of Pak regulars in the first week of August in J&K.

Pakistan had started planning guerrilla operations in J&K even while the Kutch dispute was being negotiated by Shastri and Ayub. Op Gibraltar was finalised by 26 May as a prelude to Op Grand Slam to take Akhnoor. The threat to Akhnoor including the strategic Akhnoor bridge through Chhamb in the first week of September forced Shastri into accepting Gen Chowdhury's plan in opening a fresh front outside J&K in the Punjab on 6 September. The rest is the 1965 War.

There are some striking similarities between Kutch 1965 and Kargil 1999. The initial aggression in both cases was used to test Indian resolve to defend J&K. While a ceasefire in Kutch was still being negotiated by the two sides, Pakistan was planning a large-scale infiltration of J&K with a view to capturing Akhnoor. In Kargil, Pakistan used the intrusions as a diversion to carry out the infiltration in J&K to revive the insurgency while plans for aggression predated the Lahore process.

Both in 1965 and 1999, infiltrators were Pak regulars masquerading as freedom fighters. Pakistan severely miscalculated Indian's response and the reaction of the local population in Kutch and Kargil. It had assumed Kashmiris would



revolt to support the aggression and that India would keep the conflict localised to the CFL in 1965 and not violate the LoC.

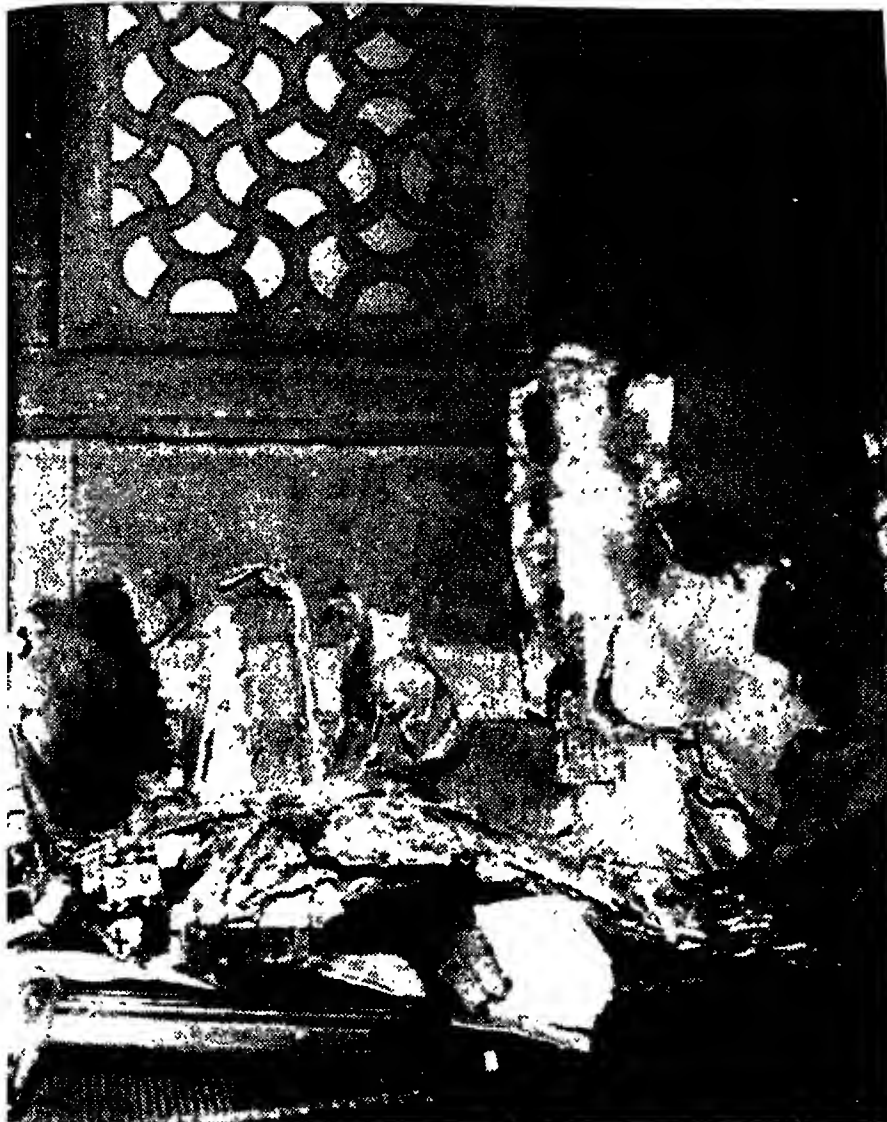
As the conflict environment was non-nuclear, India escalated the conflict to a war by opening the Lahore and Sialkot fronts. In less than six months, in 1965 two ceasefires were arranged. The first, by the British in the Rann and the second by the Russians in Tashkent. The posts captured in Kargil after the Rann and vacated were recaptured in August and yet again returned to Pakistan after Tashkent.

The aggression in Kargil 1999 was vacated in the main by Indian counter-attacks without violating the CFL (LoC since 1972). Neither side declared war nor escalated the conflict because of the nuclearised environment though Pakistan did threaten India with nuclear

blackmail. Embarrassed by international structures, Pakistan was forced to order a retreat from Kargil. There was no formal ceasefire even after Pak troops vacated the intrusions.

On the other hand, Pak guns kept up their firing in Dras and Batalik. The Kargil conflict was far from over even after vacation of aggression. Army chief Gen V.P. Malik did not declare victory. Instead, he cautioned that the war is not over. But Prime Minister Vajpayee had declared a politico-military victory on 10 July once Pak DGMO Lt. Gen Taufiq Zia sought a safe passage for withdrawal from Kargil.

The high tension of Kargil moved to Kupwara in the first week of August when armed infiltrations made bold by serial attacks on regular army and paramilitary posts. The audacity of these frontal operations marks the new and



PRIME MINISTER VAJPAYEE LOOKING AT THE REMAINS OF THE PAKISTANI AIRCRAFT

sion when it was moved from Nagaland to the Valley in 1990 after the start of the proxy war. The 8 Mountain Division had operated in the north-east for nearly 30 years, gradually establishing its intelligence gridlock and niche in counter-insurgency.

The original sin was thus committed in 1990 and perpetuated in Kargil in 1999. At the time, the army headquarters was faced with a Hobson's choice. Its only other counter-insurgency division, 57 Mountain Division deployed in Sri Lanka had just been deinducted. Rushing it into J&K immediately after Sri Lanka was considered unwise and unfair. That is how 8 Mountain Division was uprooted from Kohima to Srinagar and nine years later, moved to Kargil which presumably will become its new home.

Why Pakistan waited till Kargil was lost to start Kupwara is a mystery. Had they simultaneously or even a month later, triggered off an insurgency in the Valley, the situation would have become quite hopeless for the Indian security forces.

So while Kutch led to Kargil twice and a bigger war in 1965, this time around, Kargil has moved to Kutch via Kupwara. Despite no formal declaration of war, a war-like situation, especially on the Indian side, had moved emotions to dizzy heights. The country was incensed over the Lahore betrayal and the army had been caught napping.

Anger and tension built up with the loss of two aircraft, hundreds of young lives including the savage mutilation of corpses over the very Kargil heights. Indian troops had captured twice in 1965 and finally for keeps, in 1971. The feelings of hurt were exacerbated by the frustration of not crossing the LoC in the full knowledge that Pak regulars had committed aggression. But India's remarkable restraint and righteousness of its cause won it unprecedented diplomatic mileage.

Tension along LoC is the most infectious commodity especially in the aftermath of a war. Artillery duels, exchange of small-arms fire and Pak attacks on Srinagar are routine. Pakistan was defeated and discredited, especially after its litany of denials proved unconvincing. It could not honour its dead, it had to dis-

violent phase of insurgency in J&K. When insurgents muster courage and resources to confront the security forces, it demolishes the claim that insurgency has been contained.

Attacks on military posts can undermine morale of the security forces, lead to insurgents liberating populated areas and making such grounds no go for civil administration and the military. Between 1990 and 1993, Srinagar was completely under the control of militants till they were flushed out by massive counter-insurgency operations by the army and the BSF.

Since the Kargil intrusions took the army by surprise, the initial reaction of sidestepping troops of 8 Mountain Division from the Valley to Kargil was both inevitable and prudent. It disturbed the counter-insurgency grid painstakingly set up by this counter-insurgency divi-

The high tension of Kargil moved to Kupwara in the first week of August when armed infiltrations made bold by serial attacks on regular army and paramilitary posts. The audacity of these frontal operations marks the new and violent phase of insurgency in J&K. It demolishes the claim that insurgency has been contained

own them. It could not honour its brave because they were freedom fighters on the Indian side (only now has Pakistan acknowledged its regular troops were involved and are being honoured). It had to lie to its soldiers, its people and the next of kin of the dead. One single regiment (which was not part of the regular army till after Kargil) the Northern Light Infantry was used as a sacrificial goat...how can one trust such an army and government? Many Pakistanis are also asking the same question

This detailed background illustrates the tense and taut atmosphere preceding the return to Kutch from Kargil, also the history of how war-like situations swing from one marshy wasteland at one edge of the international border to the other mountain wasteland at the extremity of the LoC. Even in August, the mercury in Kutch is very high. The Kupwara insurgents had commenced their attacks on 6 August, 1999. A day later, Pakistan made one more attack to take a post in Siachen. There was no let-up in Kupwara.

Under these extraordinary conditions of high tension and post-war fever, the shooting down of the Atlantique maritime patrol and strike aircraft on 10 August on the Kutch border was not surprising. First the terrain. Sir Creek is a sixty-mile long estuary in the marshes in the Rann of Kutch separating Gujarat from Sindh. The demarcation of the land border pending since the Kutch war in 1965 was brought up as late as November last year as part of the Indo-Pak composite dialogue.

The marshy area of the Rann comprises several hundred smaller channels which merge into three large creeks: Sir Creek, Kori and Mianwari. Intrusions in these areas, as in 1965, can go undetected as the Rann is almost uninhabited. The aircraft was brought down in a disputed area where demarcation of land boundary has commercial implications. The determination of land border will impact on the extent of maritime borders and size of EEZ, which is believed to be rich in oil and gas but as a result of the dispute, has not been exploited by either side.

Russia and China resolved their nearly 300-year-old border dispute including the Ussuri River channel last year by leaving one contentious strip of land quarantined.

Pakistan's version of the incident is that its unarmed naval aircraft was on a training mission on its side of the border



INDIAN SOLDIERS IN J&K



INDIAN TROOPS IN KARGIL

when IAF MiG-21 aircraft intruded two km inside Pak airspace and shot it down. It was described as a cowardly act on the part of India to avenge the loss of two aircraft over Kargil. Not only did India violate Pak airspace it also transgressed land border to steal parts of the wreckage to establish it was shot over Indian skies.

There was no doubt that after Kargil and Purulia, four years earlier, the IAF is on a high alert on the western borders. It is in the same region the PAF has been most active committing six air intrusions. In one case, early this year, a Pak remotely-piloted vehicle was shot down. It is not possible to intercept the intruding aircraft everytime. It requires both coordination and luck but most of all, high sophistry of air defence early warning.

The main questions are: what was the naval aircraft which can carry a varie-

ty of lethal weapons — air-to-air missiles, air-to-surface anti-ship and anti-submarine and with a comprehensive surveillance platform — doing over land? By any definition, the Atlantique is a combat aircraft.

Why should it be on a training mission so close to the border post-Kargil when training flights are normally held in safe designated areas well away from the border? Also, there is no way an aircraft fitted with a Global Positioning Systems being monitored by its mother radar in Karachi, could have strayed across the international border.

And what is more, why did Pakistan violate the 1991 bilateral treaty to ensure that violations of each other's air space did not take place? "Combat aircraft and armed helicopters will not fly within 10 km of each other's air space including AD17." The Atlantique was clearly violating this agreement even if



Pakistan's version of the Atlantique shooting is that its unarmed naval aircraft was on a training mission on its side of the border when IAF MiG-21 aircraft intruded two km inside Pak airspace and shot it down. It was described as a cowardly act on the part of India to avenge the loss of two aircraft over Kargil

it was shot two km within Pakistan.

At the start of the Kargil War, India informed Pakistan that it would be flying its Canberra aircraft for a reconnaissance missions within 10 km of the LoC. Yet this aircraft was hit and damaged by a shoulder-fired missile by Pakistan.

The Atlantique's job is to snoop over ships at sea to establish their intentions. In 1983, then Captain Vishnu Bhagwat bringing back the Russian destroyer INS

Ranjeet, had to fire at the Atlantique as it tried to buzz his ship. These aircraft were once again active during Kargil in the Arabian Sea, monitoring the Indian naval fleet poised for a blockade of Karachi.

Pakistan had bought four of these sophisticated maritime surveillance aircraft from France. One crashed and the other has been shot down

What were Pakistani motives in order-

CRASH SITE OF THE PAKISTANI AIRCRAFT BROUGHT DOWN BY INDIAN FIGHTERS

ing the Atlantique on a high-risk mission close to the border immediately after Kargil? Like in Kargil now or the Kutch land campaign of 1965, it was to test the resolve of the Indian State. More particularly to illuminate the air defence systems in the disputed Sir Creek area. The Indian air defence systems in the area are the vital cover for strategic assets like the Koyaliya petrochemical complex and Gujarat Saurashtra industrial belt

Another reason for the dangerous mission to internationalise Sir Creek and to determine the navigability of tidal creeks by identifying inlets which could facilitate waterborne operations like infiltration.

The immediate upshot of the Kutch incident is that Pakistan has moved a battalion from Badin to Sir Creek and deployed missiles there. Has India done a Kargil in Kutch? But it has yielded some ground on diplomacy in Kutch while issuing a strong statement against trying another Purnia or an aerial Kargil, the revengists in Pakistan have one more score to settle: Kutch. Revenge for Kargil and Kutch will start in Kupwara.

It is extremely difficult to establish the exact site of shooting down an aircraft in an aerial engagement. A high-flying aircraft will drift several kilometres in the direction it is flying after being hit. Since the Atlantique was engaged in a receding mode, most of the debris fell on the Pakistan side of the border. The Indian pilots tried to follow the established rules and procedures for engagement but the Atlantique's track-patterns and behaviour when signalled to land, showed hostile intent

The doves in India say the Atlantique tragedy in Kutch could have been averted had the IAF pilots been more circumspect. The pilots who have shot down the aircraft need not have been showcased. Instead, some overtures of regret would have restored the loss of high ground in restraint. They also suggest India should share the details of the incident to avert more such in future.

In a head-on aerial confrontation such as over Sir Creek, there is no time to verify the bonafides of the intruders. The Israelis have learnt the bitter lesson: shoot first and explain later rather than explain to Saint Peter •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

Home alone

Arun Nehru: Congress to BJP via Ayodhya

It all depends on how you look at it. To the BJP, the decision to field Arun Nehru from Rae Bareilly presents a major blow to the Congress. After all, isn't he a member of the Nehru family? And wasn't he one of Rajiv Gandhi's closest friends?

Within the Congress, the decision has evoked a somewhat different response. The general attitude seems to be: he is where he belongs. After all, isn't it Arun Nehru who is generally credited with arranging to have the locks opened at the Babri Masjid? Isn't it Arun Nehru who many Sikhs hold responsible for the mobs of rampaging Hindus who attacked Sikhs on the streets of Delhi in November 1984?

Both views are unfair. Yes, Nehru is a member of the famous family. But the view that he is directly descended from Jawaharlal somewhat overstates the connection. The Nehrus are a large family and nobody had very much to do with Arun till he entered politics. Mrs Gandhi, for instance, merely thought of him as a podgy boxwallah cousin who happened to live in Calcutta. Certainly, Nehru never became the close pal of Rajiv Gandhi's that the media made out he was. (The real friends were Amitabh Bachchan and Arun Singh)

Equally, it is wrong to hold him responsible for the Babri Masjid fiasco. The decision to open the locks was taken by a judge. And there is no evidence at all that he had any connection or involvement with the Delhi riots. No doubt, he was running around the streets, trying to protect the Sikhs while his enemies spread foul rumours to the contrary.

Even so, Nehru has reason to be pleased. Till he got his ticket, he was widely regarded as a man with a glorious future — behind him. His brief spell in the limelight (1984-86) ended ignominiously when Rajiv sacked him from the home ministry. He hung around on the fringes of politics, a

large bulking presence behind Vishwanath Pratap Singh's left shoulder till 1989. Then, happy days appeared to have arrived again. V.P. Singh became Prime Minister and Nehru became his commerce minister.

But even this didn't last. Within months Nehru and his protege Arif Mohammad Khan had fallen out with Singh. Nehru went public with his disillusionment (in two interviews to SUNDAY) before declining to contest the 1991 election. At that stage,



Nehru will have to demonstrate to the BJP that he has something to offer. Being the fat cousin who abused the sister-in-law is enough to get him a ticket. But you need more than that to join the Cabinet

rumours were rife that Rajiv had agreed to let bygones be bygones and that it was only a matter of time before Nehru rejoined the Congress. Alas, Rajiv was assassinated and Narasimha Rao had no need for Nehru's services.

Then followed eight years in the wilderness made bearable only because of Nehru's willingness to drop names and to make out that anybody was anybody in Indian politics was '*mera baccha*'. When even the courtesy calls dried up, Nehru reinvented himself as a farmhouse psephologist.

Fortunately for him, election followed election and Nehru was able to give readers the view from Mehrauli. Admittedly this was quite far from the centre of the action but Nehru was undeterred. He always knew best, he maintained.

Why has the BJP given him a ticket? Wags suggest that this is his reward — a decade late — for having gifted the Ayodhya issue to the *sangh parivar*. Such a view is most unfair. The truth is that Nehru has been banging at the BJP's door for six years now with a notable lack of success. The *parivar* has been resolutely unwilling to admit him arguing that he represents the hated Nehru family and the nauseating Congress culture.

This time around, however, Nehru has two advantages. The first is that as Vajpayee attempts to rebuild the BJP as a Hindi-speaking version of the Congress party, it suits him to allow entry to all kinds of former Congressmen. The second is that the BJP hopes that Nehru will tear into Sonia Gandhi. Already, he has begun making dark noises about her anti-national links — thereby, keeping up his end of the bargain.

What happens next is anybody's guess. Nehru has decided that he will be a senior minister in the next government. The BJP is less sure. It concedes that he will win from Rae Bareilly now that the Congress has decided not to field Priyanka against him. But being an MP is one thing; being a minister is quite another.

To prove that he deserves a ministry, Nehru will have to demonstrate to the BJP that he has something to offer. Being the fat cousin who abused the sister-in-law is enough to get him a ticket. But you need more than that to join the Cabinet. •

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K. S. Narayana





YOU'VE GOT

Address: *The Prime Minister of India, New Delhi*

It's not an agony aunt column but it certainly reads like one. From disappointed love affairs in faulty telephone lines, the Prime Minister of India gets to hear it all, just by reading his mail. For instance, take the case of Pamela Williams who signs off as Pamela Gandhi. She writes that in 1987 when Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister, he visited the Andamans where he saw her and fell in love. A long and convoluted letter ends with the fantastic claim that the former Prime Minister actually married her!

Williams says that Rajiv Gandhi had then declared in the Supreme Court that 'Pamela, that is myself is the Prime Minister of India...' She then ends with a plea, 'Sir, please help me and make me the Prime Minister of India.' Atal Behari Vajpayee does not reply, for obvious reasons — conflict of interest being just one of them.

Of course, not all letters are as juicy. Most are run-of-the-mill complaints about MCD problems — water, electricity and housing. These are forwarded to the public grievances department at the Rail Bhavan. And for those with a sense of humour — ever since the Prime Minister's Office has taken

over the telecom ministry, the complaints about faulty telephones have increased in number.

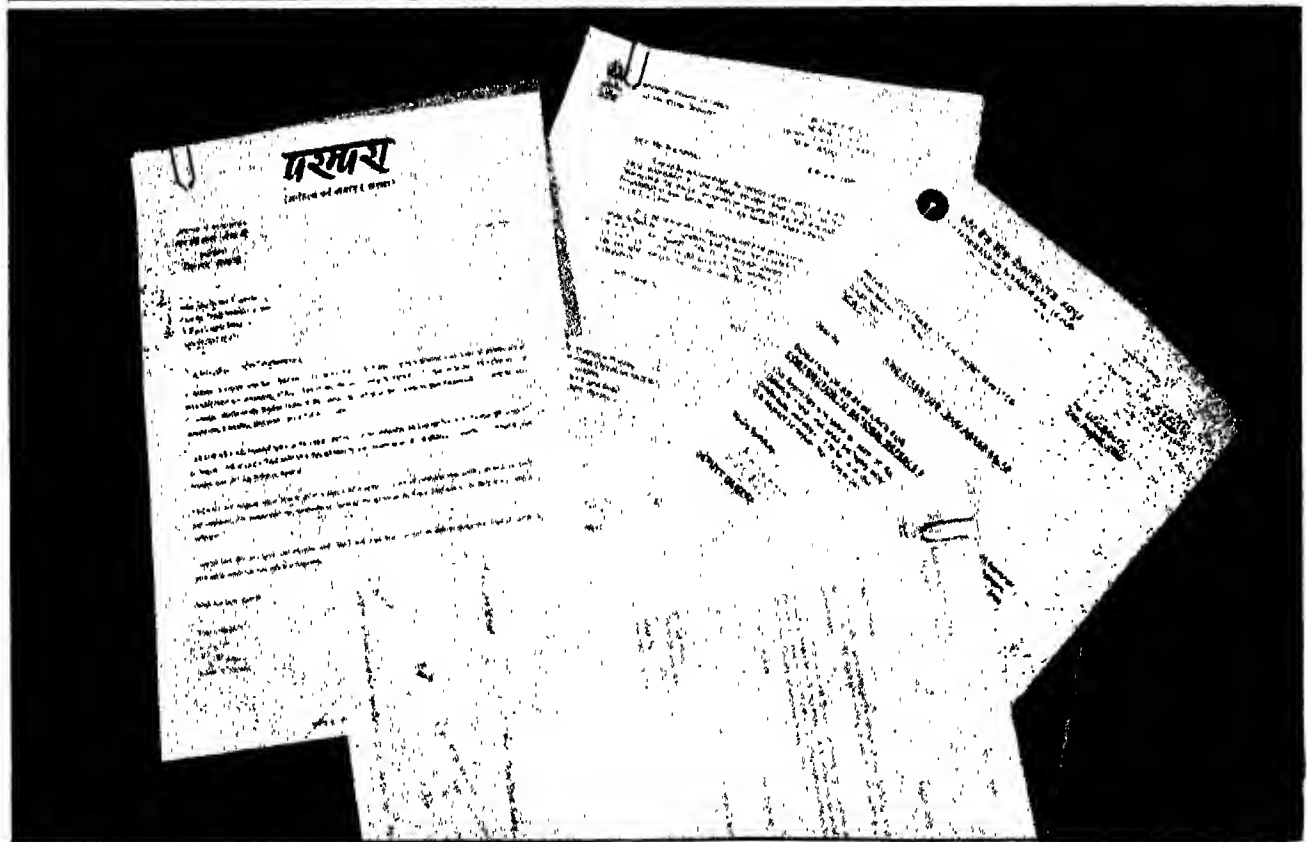
And most of the letters do get a reply, even if that is a simple acknowledgement or a thank you note. With over 300 letters a day, handling the Prime Minister's *dak* is a portfolio in itself.

The *dak* folder is handled by officials in the PMO. While the Prime Minister himself gets to see hardly ten to 15 of the letters, his men handle the rest: from drafting brief thank you notes to drafting long passages of art critique on paintings sent to the Prime Minister. Or, by simply directing the letters to the person in charge.

Most of the letters are forwarded to the sectoral officers in the PMO looking after various ministries. Others are of the *Poojya Pitaji* variety — poems, paeans of praise or simple words of encouragement. These are immediately acknowledged with thank you notes. Especially those written by schoolchildren.

Many of the letter-writers seek an appointment with the PM. At times it becomes difficult to even acknowledge

It's not an easy task, sifting the junk mail from the genuine, the cranks from the fan



MAIL

such letters as the writers forget to send their addresses. Those which are turned down are offered remedial measures by the PMO.

Such as the request for an appointment by a delegation of Burmese journalists to explain the situation to the PM. (They were asked to try the ministry of external affairs, but maybe the more appropriate forum would have been the ministry of defence, considering George Frenandes' obsession with the cause).

And of course, there are the usual requests to attend various functions. Unfortunately for the PM, his image as a poet ensures that he gets more than the usual number of requests to attend *kavi sammelans* and other such cultural affairs. The first paragraph of such letters usually consists of praise for the PM's poetry. And some even provide helpful geographical tips along with the invitations: 'the Sivananda Ashram is situated very close to the Madras airport and hence it may be easy for you to visit our ashram'.

And then there are those that are simply bizarre.

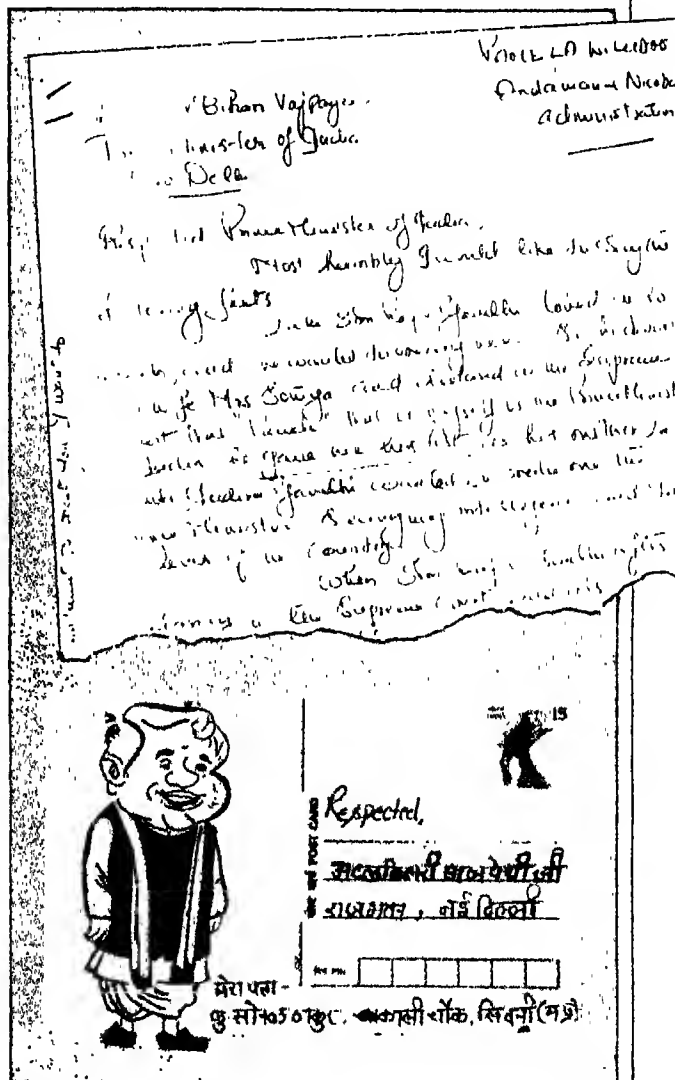
Such as an offer from a priest based in Sri Lanka who wants to travel to India to perform a pooja for the PM. Part of the pooja invites the lighting of as many oil lamps as the number of seats the PM hopes to win. The priest wants to ensure that it

is Vajpayee and not Sonia Gandhi who becomes the next Prime Minister as he is convinced that if Sonia takes oath, she would be assassinated by the LTTE. So, it is to preserve the Gandhi name that he wants to do this pooja for Vajpayee. Clearly, there is some very twisted logic at work here.

Also there are the inevitable requests from ticket seekers who want the Prime Minister to write a word of encouragement for them in their campaign blankets. But these have been put on hold — until the candidate gets a ticket.

Not all letter-writers want something from the Prime Minister. A number of them also give him advice: varying from how to run the country to what to include in his party's manifesto. One such self-appointed strategist sends his suggestions every fortnight, emboldened perhaps by the letter of

But at the end of the day each gets a reply



acknowledgement that reaches him on an equally regular basis. Interestingly he describes himself as a 'freelance letter journalist'. (But then, who else would have the stamina to give pages and pages of advice, week after week?)

It's not an easy task, sifting the junk mail from the genuine, the cranks from the fans — but at the end of the day each gets a reply.

Until he writes back. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

Before packing your food in polythene carry bags, make sure you know where they are coming from

Choking

You get your food in it, you dispose your kitchen waste in it, from where it makes its way to the local *kabadiwala* through the ragpicker who collects it from the garbage dump. It then reaches the reprocessing unit for recycling. The Indian plastic industry has grown by 169 per cent in the past five years.

But it's an eye-sore, an animal-killer, a food-contaminant—in short an environmental hazard, cry environmentalists the world over. With growing consumerism and a change in lifestyles, the demand for high quality processed food is on the rise. The emphasis is on novel presentation and packaging techniques to increase the shelf-life of food products. "Greater use of packaging material is considered the index of development in society," says P.S. Bhatnagar, secretary, ministry of food processing industries, although he admits that disposal of packaging material is a major social and environmental problem. But is it possible to package the vast range of Indian food products without using this synthetic polymeric substance?

Recent research shows that food wasted in developed countries is around 2 per cent of the amount produced whereas in developing countries it may be as much as 50 per cent, mostly because of less cost-effective packaging. Says N.C. Saha, Indian Institute of Packaging, "Packaging is a techno-economic function aimed at minimising costs of delivery while maximising sales, and hence profits." Since the aim is to protect food from deterioration and contamination throughout the effective shelf-life of the product, packaging ingredients must be safe enough to limit their migration into food. In addition they must be environment-friendly and economical. A good package must also contribute to sales promotion efforts, describe the content within the package, preserve product quality and enable effective handling.

The choice of packaging material —



glass, metal, paper, plastics, textiles and wood — depends on the nature of the food. Tin plate is corrosive and could spoil the food. Glass containers, though reusable, do not provide the same protection against UV radiation as metal cans do. "Containers for frozen, dried and dehydrated products are completely different from those used for otherwise preserved products," explains Vijay Sardana, chairman, Confederation of Indian Food Trade and Industry. Most relevant hazards are moisture gain or loss, the

effects of gases and light. Moisture can lead to caking of powdered products, softening of biscuits leading to bacterial and mould growth. Food such as fried nuts, potato chips and oils are susceptible to deterioration from contact with Oxygen leading to rancidity. Spices, coffee, tea need gas barrier and odour-proof packaging.

Plastic is light-weight, highly functional and economically viable. In semi-rigid and flexible forms plastics

of Plastic



RUPINDER SHARMA

have the following advantages:

- protects from physical damage and contamination
- guards against light, water vapour, gases, thermal changes and bacteria
- highly cost-effective, low storage and handling costs.

Polymers themselves are not hazardous and do not react to body fluids. However, additives such as residual monomers extracted by the food packed may pose health hazards. Shobha Deshpande, a housewife, found to her horror

that the fish she had bought from the market turned black after she microwaved it. She was later informed that it was caused by the lead-salt extract from the carry bag. We may be regularly taking in copper (blue bags), barium (green bags) and chromium (red) salts with our fruits,

Plastics are light-weight, economical and not hazardous by themselves. But additives extracted from recycled plastic by the food packed can cause the damage

vegetables, sweets, curd... and not knowing it. Carry bags are certainly not food-grade. Some of them are made from recycled PVC shoe-soles and acid cans!

After use, polythene carry bags, which are non-biodegradable, ought to be incinerated, buried in landfills or recycled.

But in the absence of an efficient waste collection system, they are usually strewn around in our surroundings or accumulate in garbage heaps. Animals



often choke on them and die. According to environmentalists, they float on the rivers close to cities like the Yamuna, settle on their beds, cutting off oxygen to aquatic life. They clog sewage pipes and prevent methane gas from evaporating, which often causes explosions. They block off air supply to anything they rest on. Their very advantages as packaging ingredients make them the environmentalist's nightmare.

Ragpickers sell plastic waste for Rs 2 a kg and they are back in circulation after being recycled — slightly more poisonous each time. While virgin plastic bags sell for Rs 80 a kg, most retailers settle for the recycled ones priced in the range of Rs 45-50 a kg. That's the lure of cost minimisation!

While environmentalists cry hoarse over this menace, the plastic industry continues to flourish on grounds of affordability and the livelihood that it offers. But with repeated recycling, not only does the carrying strength of the bags weaken, they begin to look unhygienic and repulsive. The concern over contamination relates to mainly critical applications like plastic piping systems,

■ From the present 2.7 million tonnes, the demand for plastics in India is expected to cross 4.2 million tonnes by 2001-2.

■ Connaught Place in New Delhi alone generates 50,000 plastic bags every day.

■ An average Delhi neighbourhood of 1000 houses junks around 5000 plastic bags every day.

■ Up to 30 per cent of the total garbage accumulated in Delhi are plastic bags.

water storage tanks, packaging for food articles, water, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. Last year, there was a new legislation. According to Recycled Plastics Usage Rules, 1998:

■ No person shall use carry bags or containers made of recycled plastics for storing, carrying and packaging food-stuffs.

■ The minimum thickness of carry bags made of virgin plastic shall not be less than 20 microns.

■ Recycled carry bags and containers

shall not be pigmented, the minimum thickness shall not be less than 25 microns, reprocessing and recycling shall be undertaken strictly in accordance with Indian Standards and the end product shall be marked as 'recycled' along with the indication of the percentage of use of recycled material.

Rules are fine. But the next time the roadside *dhabawala* dishes out your favourite *dal makhni* in a pigmented carry bag — will you stop to question him on its origin? Will his answer suffice to reassure you in matters of personal hygiene? It's time we started thinking in terms of alternatives like paper, jute and cloth bags. Aluminium is yet another alternative packaging material for processed food and beverages. It is recyclable and corrosion-resistant.

It's time people were better informed about the hazards of plastic packaging of ready-to-eat food. And relying on environmentalists and NGOs will not serve the purpose. For starters, practices like segregation of waste at the collection stage by having separate bins for non-biodegradable waste will do. But the dependence on plastics needs to be



CASH FROM TRASH

Plastic waste can replace wood as furniture material

The plastic industry, today, is plagued by the P-factor. When tackling pollution — both real and perceived — is the need of the hour, Eco-Wud can be a step in the right direction.

Touted as an 'all-weather everlasting alternative to wood', Eco-Wud is being manufactured by Amarnath Enviroplast, in Falta, West Bengal, using non-recyclable plastic and jute waste. The 'environment-friendly, high quality, and futuristic natural fibre-reinforced composite board' is non-degradable and is believed to provide a 'superior alternative' to wood, metals and stone. It can be processed and handled like wood without fear of splintering or cracking. Its high modulus and tensile strength, longevity and durability makes it the 'hi-tech construction material for the next millennium'.

Eco-Wud was born out of concern and commitment. "Not only will Eco-Wud save our forests, it will also help us tackle the ever-increasing menace of disposing multi-layered plastic waste," explains Pradip Kumar Chopra, director, Amarnath Enviroplast. "What's more, the technology is completely in-house, and the machine, which was fabricated in Germany till now, is now being fabricated by Neptune Plastic, Calcutta."

Sumit Das Gupta/Calcutta



Garden furniture made from Eco-Wud

reduced. For in future it would indeed be difficult to survive in a world in which plastics are allowed to grow and proliferate. •

Devdatta Das/New Delhi

"If we believe that the rescue of Kosovo refugees is a moral objective worth achieving, then we must go to war. If we believe that the rescue isn't worth the loss of lives in combat, we should abandon the cause. Wars may ultimately have a humanitarian basis. But they can't be conducted by humanitarian means. This is the fundamental contradiction we have yet to face."

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BBC WORLD

Knowing Is Everything



NO NONSENSE, ONLY COMMON SENSE

For quite some time now, guys, and girls, on Bollywood's starry circuit have been laying it on when it came to promoting the cause of the party of their choice. But probably, never have so many converged at the same time for one single bloc. Congress election managers say party president Sonia Gandhi requested **Madhuri Dixit**, **Mahima Chaudhary** and **Dilip Kumar** to campaign for them ahead of the elections. While the first two add glamour content, the last-named was in Bhopal, MP, late last month, where he played his new role to perfection. "It so happens that I went



to meet a *bewa* (widow) and while speaking to her it came out from my mouth whether I can serve you in any way," he told the crowd. "She sent me here..." The clincher came almost immediately after: "year 2000 means no nonsense, only common sense." It was his way of telling people to vote Congress: when he said 'common sense', he raised the hand of Suresh Pachauri, the likely candidate from the city.



SHE ISN'T JUST A SWELL, SVELTE GIRL

The days of video jockeying are over, modelling's in; but that's half the story. **Meghana Reddy**, ex-Channel V veejay, now gets what's probably the biggest exposure of her life. Along with her mom **Nalini Reddy**, who's married to a Bombay businessman, Meghana (in a PVC catsuit which she designed herself) features on the cover of the August issue of *National Geographic*, though the copy has got nothing to do with either modelling in the subcontinent or glamorous Asian VJs. What must have helped was the fact that her mother happens to be a microbiologist. The intro to the text, which is about intermixing of global cultures and how the world's coping with changing generations, provides a clue. It reads: "Good move. People move. Ideas move and cultures change." Meghana and her mom are described as "elites for whom style is their cornerstone." Ambition too. Meghana has now flown to the US to train as an actress.



REVELATIONS



SORRY IS THE HARDEST WORD

Repentance comes late these days. After the contrite South Africans — who couldn't make up their minds for more than a hundred years whether to say sorry or not — it's film star **Amrita Singh**'s turn now. On 3 August, 1999, exactly five years and 98 days after she beat up Kanan Diwecha, a lady columnist with *Star & Style* magazine, Singh tendered an affidavit in Bombay High Court apologising for the assault. The delicately-worded, remorse-laden confession came when her counsel Shrish

Gupte declared in court "Much water has flown under the bridge since the incident. My client has matured since then. She realises her mistake." Unfortunately, Diwecha was in no mood to accept stale apologies. Anita Naqvi, who appeared for Diwecha, replied: "It took five years for them to tender the apology...that too because the matter has come on board. We definitely cannot finish the matter in five minutes." Last heard, the actress had taken back her apology.



OF AN EX-PRIME MINISTER

An old man with a pout, but senility isn't one of his problems. **P.V. Narasimha Rao**, whose post-prime ministerial life hasn't been easy at all, is writing a book. *Dramatis Personae*, is a 70-page "clinical and factual" account of events which preceded the Babri Masjid demolition. It's expected to be released before the polls

actions when he was India's CEO

■ Some information on secret negotiations worked out within the Congress and the Babri groups, VHP and others

■ The BJP's betrayal — how, after assuring the courts of a symbolic *kat seva*, it let the PM down

What we shouldn't expect

■ How, in the first place, he allowed himself to be let down

What we can expect

■ An apologia of his

CELEBRITY TALK SHOW

Shekhar Kapur and **Mahesh Bhatt**, two directors who recently got into scraps with censors, got talking. Bhatt quizzed, Kapur answered. Areas where we got enlightened. Excerpts:

Q: Shekhar, everyone has someone who gives a push which instils self-belief — the mentor — who was yours?

A: Not really, I went through it on my own.

Q: Once you came to my office feeling low and I told you 'Shekhar, you are one of our finest directors and you shouldn't lose hope'. Was that the moment?

A: Are you trying to say you were my mentor? Remember the time I returned from England after doing my CA? I went around asking everyone to take me as an actor. I came to you as well and you said: 'Shekhar, why do you have a smile on your face...you have no reason to smile.'



Q: How did Elizabeth come by?

A: After *Bandit Queen*, I had reason to believe I stood a good chance in Hollywood. I kept travelling to Los Angeles, blowing up all my fixed deposits, staying in good hotels...but all the offers which came by talked of stories on an Indian in America or an American in India till *Elizabeth* came along. I found myself saying yes for a film about a personality I didn't know. All I knew was that Elizabeth was known as the Virgin Queen.

Q: You have seen it all, from Bollywood to Hollywood... What is it that the white man has and we don't...

A: Making a film here is like going to a *mandi*, bargaining for everything. Out there it's like a superbazar. Everything is well laid out, prices are fixed and it's more organised. But let me tell you, I feel creativity comes out of chaos and that's here.

Q: What was the difference between *Bandit Queen* and *Elizabeth*?

A: In *Bandit Queen*, I never watched the box office. In *Elizabeth* I did. In *BQ* I was honest, in *Elizabeth* I was smart...at times.

Q: Every creative person has this fear of his creativity dying...

A: I'm petrified about it. But in my case it's slightly different. Creative urge comes suddenly so it has to go the same way...I know it will happen. What scares me is it happening and I not knowing about it.

Meet the new
generation of
money-savvy, smart
investors

Big bucks.

He's rich. At 14, Ramaswamy, a Standard IX student in a boarding school in Tirupati has a bank balance of Rs 25,000 — his own hard-earned money. What set the alarm bells ringing was the surface mail for returns of his ICICI bonds. Although his teacher mother and banker father panicked, rushing to counselling centres, Swamy remains his cool self. "I haven't robbed that money — I have earned it through fair means," he explains to his mother.

And as if that was not enough, he also has a partner (thrice his age) — 'somebody' he met at the bank — who chips in Rs 25 for every hundred-rupee-bond that he invests in. The deal: each time the amount gets doubled. Swamy's partner gets a 50 per cent share of the profit. In case he does not make a profit, the partner lets go of the money invested.

His knack for personal economics showed early. In his younger days, Swamy was the only boy in the hostel with access to the outside world on a regular basis — his grandmother was very ill and he was allowed to visit her every weekend. For every article that he bought for his friends he would charge a rupee. He had discovered wholesale dealers, from whom he bought the stuff at a cheaper rate than the market price. This went on for a couple of years till his grandmother died and he lost the money.

Sukhvinder is a VIth Standard student in a suburban school in Bombay. He gets a daily allowance of Rs 28, out of which he spends Rs 14 on commuting to school and food. The rest, meant for Coke, is saved in a bull-shaped money-box — significant, since Harshad Mehta is his inspiration. In a period of one-and-a-half years, Sukhvinder has saved more than Rs 3,000 which he wants to invest in shares. However, for the time being, he has been persuaded to put the money in a bank. Says father Janak Singh, "All the initiative — to save and invest money — came from him. We had to just guide him."

Ariyabir Majumdar, a student of Class Nine in Saint Joseph's School in Calcutta, gets Rs 10 per week from his father. Though his friends get five times more than what he gets, Ariyabir is not complaining. At 15, he knows exactly how to fill the gap. "I teach two students — one is in Class Five and the other in Class Six — and earn about Rs 500 per week," he says. Besides, he has also taken up a part-time job at an institute. For each student he recruits, he gets a commission of 10-20 per cent. He has already saved Rs 6,000 which he plans to invest in his college education abroad.

Thirteen-year-old Ravikanth studies in one of the most prestigious schools in Bangalore. His parents are separated. For Ravi that means a lot of money (about Rs 200-300 a day) — the only way to compensate for 'lack of attention', he says. What does he do with all that money? "Buy Pepsi," pat comes the reply. Crateloads of Pepsi are meant for the consumption of his friends who are very fond of the soft drink. "If you have money, you have friends, otherwise it is difficult to survive," he says. He looks at it as an investment — towards a more 'long-lasting' friendship. He feels these are the people who will stand by him in the long run.



anxiety-ridden score card that worries him these days. It is the shrinking size of his wallet that concerns him the most. And what's more, this street-smart child-next-door is not just spending with the same nonchalance as his adult counterpart but is also investing, to make some quick money.

A survey conducted by Turner International's Cartoon Network has thrown up interesting data on the spending pattern of children. While for most children within the age group of 8-16 years, the source of income is still limited to the pocket money, a large number of children are also earning. What's more, some of them have acquired a knack for supplementing their existing funds.

"The new young generation is more financially mature. They may spend

Meet the children of the new millennium. It's not the weight of his ever-burgeoning school bag, nor the

bright kids



RUPINDER SHARMA

money but they also save and invest at a very young age," says Dr Harish Shetty, a psychiatrist and a student's counsellor in several schools in Bombay. "What's surprising is that they are already aware of ways to multiply it," he adds. Teachers inform that there are several children, some as young as nine-year-olds, who deposit money in the bank and maintain their own records. One, in fact, asked his parents to invest his money in a post-office scheme.

Rough estimates from teachers and parents confirm that children within the age group of 8-16 years from middle-class to affluent segments of society usually get pocket money in the range of Rs 300-5,000. In a suburban school in the affluent Juhu Scheme area, it is a common sight to spot students splurging

on audio compact discs or playing pool in expensive clubs. Arvind Tyagi, 14, doesn't mind blowing it up on his father's scooter. Aware of the fact that riding a scooter without a valid licence is illegal, this Delhi lad finds the thrill of showing off his 'own' vehicle irresistible. "Having a scooter among my age group is like a status symbol, y'know," he says. Although choosing a career is going to be a toss-up between engineering and computers, Tyagi is quite focussed when it comes to the subject of making money. "I want to collect lots of it," he says, simply.

The novelty factor is that children now apply their minds in money-management. The patterns vary from Delhi-Bombay to Bangalore-Madras, but most children realise that in order to

spend, one also needs to make money. A teacher narrates an interesting incident involving a Class Five student from an affluent family. This child was more than comfortable in terms of pocket money, yet she circulated her story books to her class-mates, charging Rs 2 per book for a week's loan.

"Children have become money-savvy at a very young age, thanks to the prevailing consumerist culture in our society and also through the media and availability of technology," informs Dr Usha Nair, director of the Unit for Child and Youth Research at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Socio-economic backgrounds also have a role to play. "With increasing number of children chasing decreasing number of seats in educational institutions and scholarships drying up, the professional classes are more aware of the value of money, which they try to drill in their children," says Chandra Shekhar Mukherji, neuro-psychiatrist, associated with a charitable society called Children In Pain. "There is a view that there is no nest-egg or a back-up stash'ed away and children will have to make their own future."

The Cartoon Network survey highlights the difference in spending patterns of children in the four metros. While there was a marked similarity between the Delhi-Bombay children, those from Bangalore and Madras thought and spent differently. Children from Delhi and Bombay are interested in fashion and lifestyle products whereas children from Bangalore and Madras are more interested in computers. Sonam Joshi, 13, who studies in Delhi's Sardar Patel Vidyalaya, spends her money on the regular teenage fancies — "books, entertainment magazines, chips and ice creams in the school canteen". Her fantasy is to get a high-paying job once she grows up and save up enough to buy a car, and generally splurge on books on clothes.

The Calcutta-bred child prefers to save it all for the future. Says 10-year-old Arjun Bajpai, a child model who makes Rs 500-1500 per shoot and saves with a bank, "When I grow up I'll build a house for my parents on a plot of land my father owns." He does send part of his earnings to homes for deprived children, though.

Even while spending these children have different priorities. Given the choice, Delhi-Bombay children would either

buy a car or spend on clothes, whereas children from Madras would build a house and Bangalore children would first like to donate in charity.

"I feel Delhi has a lot of liaison money, basically easy money, and hence the preference is for more fashionable stuff," says Ali Khwaja, director of Banjara Academy (a counselling and social sciences institute), Bangalore. Ali also believes that Bangalore children are inclined towards charity only because the city has a 'tradition and culture' of social service and charity. "In fact, in Bombay children are more business-

minded because people have set up business and come up the hard way," he adds.

But children turning thoroughbred money managers is something parents will take some time adjusting to. Most parents still believe that money corrupts. But then, how does one dissuade a kid wanting to invest? Surely, that isn't criminal? A mother working with a top rung IT company in Bangalore explains her dilemma. When the company gave her a fancier car than the one she was already using, she still preferred to send her daughter to school in the modest old model. The idea was to instill values of

MONEY MATTERS

Getting used to a downgraded lifestyle is never easy



Children today are all too familiar with the new, improved lifestyle of their parents — it is something they have grown up with. "The problem begins when children take five-star holidays and air travel for granted," explains Ali Khwaja of the Banjara Academy. He recalls an incident where a child wouldn't accept a 'smaller' car after his father

changed his company (which did not provide him with the same model he had been driving). "These are the kind of problems one faces, especially when you are part of the brutal corporate culture where ups and downs are all too sudden," he adds.

Anjali Agrawal was the head of the media relations department in a foreign bank with a fully-furnished apartment in South Bombay. She lost her job last year. More than her, it was her 15-year-old son who took it badly. A Tenth Class student, Rajeev could not come to terms with the fact that they would have to shift to the suburbs, that he wouldn't be studying in his south Bombay school or that his monthly allowance of Rs 3,500 will be reduced. After a couple of months he quit studies despite vehement protests from all quarters to start his own business. This was only to continue living in south Bombay.

There are others who grow up realising that the lavish lifestyle and plush homes remain till their parents jobs are intact. "Some times it's good that my daughter understands that our own house is not as fancy as the one we live in at present," says an anxious mother. "However, I sometimes feel she is a little insecure about losing it one day — she does not like the house we built in the outskirts of Bangalore," she adds.

Most counsellors feel a 'downgrading' of lifestyle does have an impact on the child's psyche. Says Anjali Chhabaria, a Bombay-based counsellor, "It largely depends on how children are brought up. All these things can be tackled if parents are a little more sensitive and intelligent while handling such issues."



SONAM JOSHI (13)

SOURCE OF INCOME: pocket money and gifts

FUTURE PLANS: save enough to buy a car and splurge on books and clothes



ARJYABIR MAJUMDAR (15)

SOURCE OF INCOME: teaching younger kids and recruiting students for a training institute

FUTURE PLANS: saving money to study abroad

simple living in the child. When the mother tried telling her daughter how she commuted to school by bus when she was her daughter's age, she was told, "You had an option to save the bus fare by walking to school, at that time a bus ride was a luxury. Why did you not save money instead?"

On being told by his mother that it was not right to make money at his age, the afore-mentioned Ramaswamy had a

**ARVIND TYAGI (14)****SOURCE OF INCOME:** pocket money from parents**FUTURE PLANS:** making 'lots of' money

PIC COURTESY/ARINDAM CHAKRABORTY

ARJUN BAJPAI (10)**SOURCE OF INCOME:** modelling
FUTURE PLANS: building a house for his parents

ready answer. "What's wrong with making money through fair means, whatever the age may be?" His contention is that most people are 'dumb' and it is when they can't make money that they brand it as 'unethical'. Despite his impeccable academic performance, Swamy's mother was very worried when she discovered more than Rs 5,000 in his cupboard. But he silenced his mother with, "Sonia Gandhi has made a lot of money

AGE GROUP: 7-18 years**AVERAGE ALLOWANCE:** Rs 30 per week**AVERAGE ANNUAL INCOME:** Rs 3,710 (Delhi); Rs 3,595 (Bombay); Rs 2,411 (Bangalore); Rs 1,591 (Madras)

■ On the whole, girls get more than boys (Rs 43 against Rs 35)

■ On the whole, girls spend more than boys (Rs 61 against Rs 56)

RESPONSES TO SOME COMMONLY-ASKED QUESTIONS:**If rich, how would you spend your money?****DELHI:** buy a car or build a house**BOMBAY:** set up a business or buy clothes**MADRAS:** build a house or set up a business**BANGALORE:** donate in charity before spending on self**What's the latest thing people are doing?****DELHI:** wearing jeans**BOMBAY:** wearing jeans**MADRAS:** computers**BANGALORE:** computers**Where do you save your money?****DELHI:** in a piggy bank**BOMBAY:** with their parents, rarely have a bank account**MADRAS:** most likely to have a bank account**BANGALORE:** most likely to have a bank account

Survey conducted by: Cartoon Network (Turner International Ltd)

**DR C.S. MUKHERJI**

PRADIP SANYAL

"The professional classes are more aware of the value of money, which they try to drill in their children"

— who has ever bothered to ask her where all that money for the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation comes from?"

Brinda Subramaniam, the counsellor handling Swamy's case, says, "Children these days are far more intelligent and the problem starts when they sense any kind of discrepancies between what parents practice and what they preach." Besides, most parents feel that since the general standard of living of most people has gone up, children ask for the best of everything. "Also, there is a need to recognise and appreciate the growing independence of thought amongst children," adds Brinda

While the debate for what's right and what's not is still on, the bottomline is that children these days like money — their own money — just like their elders at home. As for parents, watch out, the next time you wrack your brains over which scrips to invest in, your child may have already got there. ■

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore with Kanjai Walla/Bombay, Ajanta Ganguly/Calcutta and Garima Kalra/New Delhi

Bleeding Art

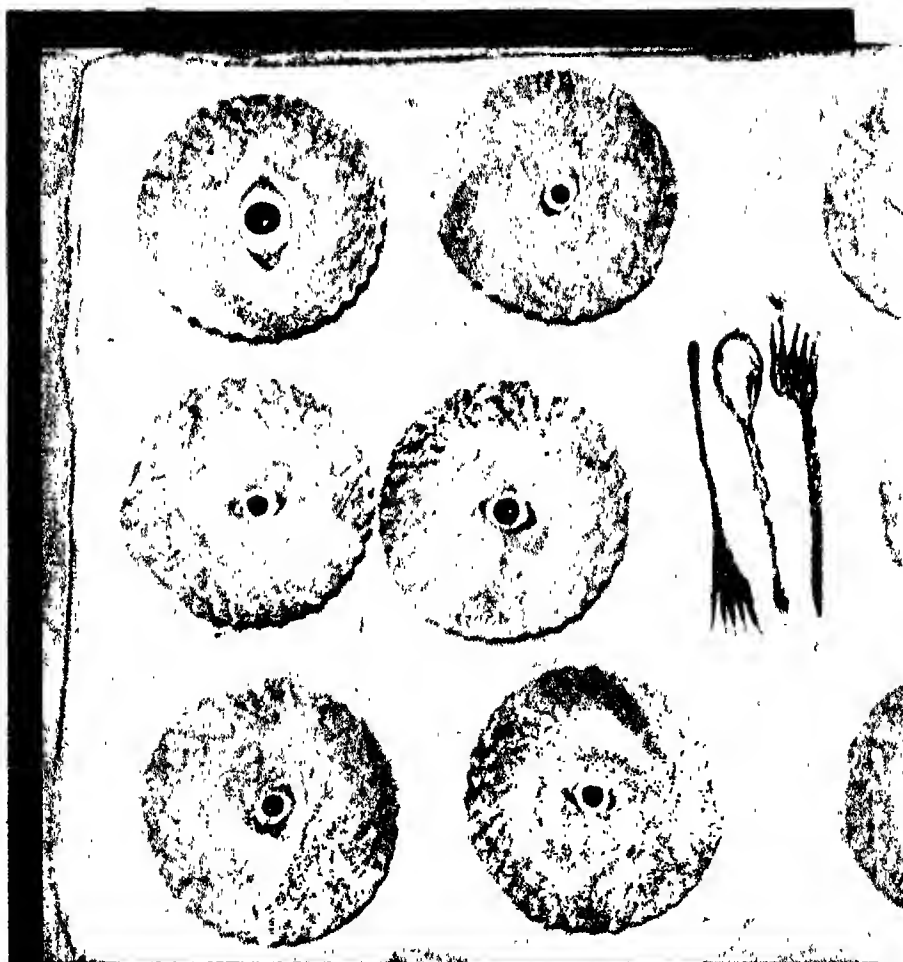
A pained look at war and mutilation

Not a bad time to be young. In a not-so-young country where thinking folks, for the past 50 years or so, have been trying to get the hang of what this so-so independence has brought for them — that is apart from assorted stuff like war and terrorism, nukes and rights abuse, space rockets and fiscal deficits. So long, all these have made up the stormy domain of brawling politicians. Not any more. Things have changed, because in the rough Nineties, in this kick-and-punch dogfight of a living, this unspoken politics of struggle has found a way right into the artistic subconscious of a group of young explorers who have got lots to say and aren't afraid to say it on canvas.

That was the impression you got. When you stepped off the elevator, turned right, slid in mechanically through the glass doors and entered CIMA gallery in south Calcutta. You walked into a bang. Let's face it, even the most arty types visiting a gallery where an exhibition with as innocent-sounding a name as Emerging Trends is going on, would, at the most, expect new techniques, maybe newer media. But stuff like blood-filled jars, revolver-wielding assassins or eyes served up for breakfast? *Come on.*

It was just a matter of time before they all came along. Tumbled in would be an apter expression. With the unwritten, and sometimes scrawled-out messages which seem to say to the viewer, O.K., you can bring your artistic judgement with you, but this is what we say. Sumitro Basak, one of the artists whose works were on display, kind of summed it up. He called it the "assault of images". And they are everywhere.

So they are, but it's the shock factor that gets you first. It's kind of a mind game. Two of the exhibits, Mithu Sen's *Breakfast Table I and II* (mixed media), come as hideous assaults on sensibility. One table has dishes with eyes served up, the other has on offer a human heart and red chillies. The background is a world map. One viewer, who didn't

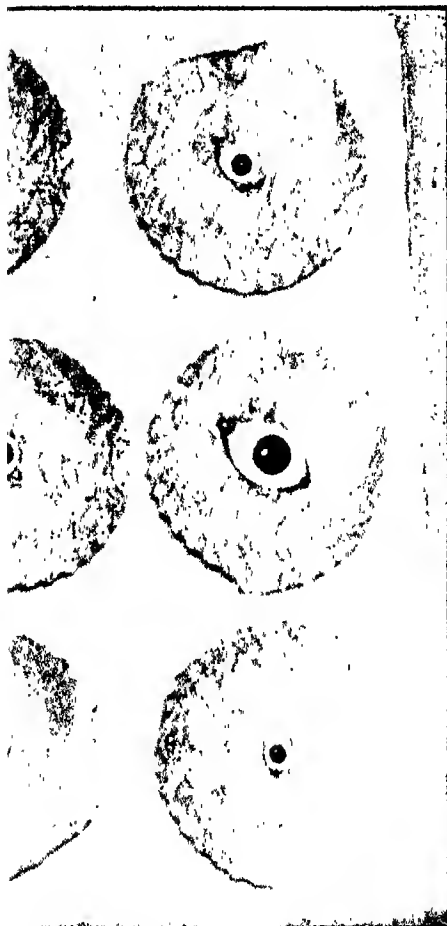


Mithu Sen's *Breakfast Table I*. Her message is clear: you draw your own conclusions, because I have drawn mine.



immediately latch on to the hidden but obvious implication of these two Kargil-inspired works, asked the artist "Where's the anger in your art?" Sen's response was in turn a cocky, rasping question: "Do you," she asked him, "have eyes for breakfast?"

Answers like that confirm at least one fact: that the artist knows what is artistically profane and what is permissible.



The images could have been more naturalistic, men-on-the-battlefield types. They are not. Sometimes, the abstract conveys more than the concrete, especially when there's a hell of a lot to tell — about war, torture, mutilation. It's the artist's own artistic gambit — tight, controlled and stark — but a gambit nevertheless. Her message is clear: you draw your own conclusion, because I have drawn mine.

In some of her other works on display, the map of India occurs like a ready-to-explode leitmotif. The blood-filled jar shows the bloodletting that's going on everywhere. The maps, obviously, are locales where the artist's imagination has come home to roost. There's



Sumitro Basak's *A Hunting Scene* is a sarcastic jab at the black buck incident where Salman Khan and a few others shot dead the endangered species inside a protected area



one question that naturally springs to mind here. Can art, despite all its high individuality stakes, be so overtly political? It can, as far as these artists are concerned.

One reason why Sen's macabre drawings don't look out of place is because by the time you have done a recce of the works on display, you realise that the political expressionism at play isn't a chance presence. Contemporary times, incomplete lives, the not-so-successful market economics of small-time traders, dismembered bodies swept along by a dark river, masked stagnated people rising as if in protest — all these come out in Samit Das' *The River* (mixed media on paper) and *People With Wooden Mask* (mixed media on photostat).

It's easy to get lost in the labyrinth of canvas-and-paper. Say, for instance, with Arup Ghosh's collages: arrogantly provocative fusions of scraps of paper crammed with meaning. What actually spares us the ordeal of having to salvage our overwhelmed yet splintered response is the sometimes mystical, sometimes satirical, and at times deliberately rough-edged material thread that runs through. They have a kind of liberating effect: they tell you a story, man in society, man reacting against abuse of power, against

real-life situations.

Sumitro's *A Hunting Scene* (mixed media on paper) is a sarcastic jab at the black buck incident where Salman Khan and a few others shot dead the endangered species inside a protected area. The artist, who's just 24, punches together myth, cut-out of a film still, intrudes himself and finally delivers his judgement — a deer between the hungry jaws of an animal sneaking out of a reserved area. "This is what is happening," says the artist. You aren't even safe where safety is supposedly guaranteed. Doesn't speak much for the system, does it?

It doesn't. But that's how it is. Somehow, it's easier to understand the psychology at work. Young people in a scrappy, fragmented world. Amritah Sen's (she's just 26) *The Assassination* (mixed media on paper) is a take-off on a poem she read. "I am a Calcasian [which means she is a confirmed Calcuttan] and I always figure in my work," she says. What it means is: we all have our individual responses; our works are *our* responses to what's going on around us. Most of us tend to wake up with ugly hangovers. Not these artists. They are going to ride out the storms, create what they feel, and be what they are. •

Ananda Kamal Sen/Calcutta

Caught in a time warp

In India, children's films have not progressed much since the Thirties

Last week, as the festival organised by the Children's Film Society of India (CFSI) in Delhi came to an end, it left in its wake disturbing questions which have plagued the issue of children's films in this country for long.

The three major films showcased at the festival offered a sampling of what children's films should ideally be like: Virendra Saini's *Kabhi Pass Kabhi Fail* features a mathematical prodigy who resists exploitation by a greedy conman, and regains his gift when he returns to a state of pastoral innocence; A.K. Bir's *Nandan* is about a little boy who is tempted to do the wayward thing but becomes good again in the end; and Santosh Sivan's *Malli* is about a little girl who loves animals, and nature.

All three films have won national awards this year. Saini's *Kabhi Pass Kabhi Fail* has been judged the Best Children's Film, *Nandan* the best Oriya film and the child actress Shwetha in *Malli* won the Best Child Artiste award. It is the first time that the CFSI has had such a haul at the national level; it is also the first time the films have been made with a degree of sophistication and style, especially Sivan's film, which is wondrously shot.

But child protagonists of these films remain the good little kids of yesteryears who hurriedly retract their feet when the going gets a little messy. Although children's films look more visually attractive than before, and often have stars appearing in them (Naseeruddin Shah, Deepthi Naval and Tom Alter play cameo roles in *Kabhi Pass...*) and have children putting in realistic performances, one can't escape the feeling that they've been cast in the same old preachy mould.

"You should see the kind of scripts we get, they are so Thirties in their attitude," says Sai Paranjpye, chairperson, CFSI, and a veteran maker of children's films. "The best films for children are films for the complete family, not films which are childish." Sadly, not too many films that the CFSI produces — features, shorts, animation — take this dictum to heart.

The CFSI also has huge difficulties in



Malli: a film about a little girl's love for animals and nature



reaching its target audience. Apart from the biennial national festival it holds, the body negotiates with schools and state governments for screenings, but has not managed to reach enough young people. "Our efforts from now [on] will be to widen our base," said the newly-appointed CFSI CEO, Yash Choudhary.

But for that the CFSI will have to be more inclusive, and more open about its proceedings, especially about its script committee which vets and approves the scripts which come its way. When SUNDAY asked Paranjpye about the people on the committee, she refused to

give their names on the grounds that they — "all eminent people" — would be badgered by potential script writers.

Perhaps they do need to be badgered by people who will inundate them with scripts, so that there are enough stories to choose from, so that truly original and imaginative stories surface.

The makers of children's films in India have existed in a time warp. There is barely any recognition of the fact that children's tastes have changed dramatically: your average urban kid is surfing the Net seemingly before he learns to walk; in semi-urban areas children have access to cable television and even in the deepest rural pocket there is Doordarshan, and the odd film. The proliferation of such software has ensured that the typical CFSI product — with limited visual appeal and a heavy moralising tone — sinks without a trace. It is only when the CFSI starts to seriously put the principle of fun and playfulness in its films, that there will be a real children's film movement. "Right now we are very far from it," admits Paranjpye. •

Shubhra Gupta/New Delhi

Merit as the basis

The SC has given a bold judgement on reservations in postgraduate courses



It is good that the Supreme Court has given a clear verdict on the demand for reservations in postgraduate and super speciality courses. The honourable judges must be

congratulated for such a bold judgement in which they have disallowed this demand in the national interest. There may be some resentment here and there, but by and large people have welcomed it. Those who are casteist and vote-hungry may raise it. But those who are sensible and believe in social welfare will appreciate it.

Those who want to get into post-graduation and super speciality courses through reservation are the ones who have already availed of the facility. So they should not be allowed again as they belong to the creamy layer.

For example, if somebody has already become a doctor or engineer through reservation, then why should he get another opportunity to enhance his career? He should try to achieve it on the basis of merit. If we do not do that, there will be many degree holders but highly incompetent doctors and engineers, and that will be disastrous.

So far leaders like Kanshi Ram, Mayawati, Ram Vilas Paswan and Laloo Prasad Yadav have not criticised the judgement. The Supreme Court has also ruled that a certain percentage of marks should be fixed for admissions in engineering and medical courses and candidates from the reserved categories should not be selected below this level even if seats remain vacant.

I am not against reservations for the weaker sections of society. In fact, I strongly feel that the condition of Dalits is still very bad in our country. Unfortunately, during the last 50 years, those amongst the Dalit communities who have achieved something through reservations, have not done anything for the people of their own community.

In fact, those from the Scheduled

Castes and Scheduled Tribes who have already availed of reservations should be considered part of the creamy layer and their children should not be allowed to avail of reservations. Only some thousands of Dalit families have taken the benefit of reservation policy while crores still live in miserable conditions.



For medical treatment, none of the politicians supporting reservations goes to any Dalit doctor. V.P. Singh loves to be treated in London, Kanshi Ram in Japan and Sitaram Kesri in Houston

This facility should be marked for the children of those Dalits who are still reeling under poverty.

The idea behind reservations was to help the SC/STs and Other Backward Classes because they were economically backward. Owing to poor economic conditions, they were unable to come up in society the way people of the forward castes have. Which means for poor Dalits and backward classes economic help is more important than reservations.

I think the government and all political parties should think of a common proposal by which poor Dalits and OBCs

can be helped economically. If students from these communities who are really poor get enough money for their education and food, they would not require reservation. By doing this we will be having competent IAS and IPS officers, engineers and doctors from the Dalits and backward classes.



Of late I have conducted a survey which proved that none of the politicians and bureaucrats supporting reservations goes for medical treatment to any Dalit doctor. While V.P. Singh loves to be treated in London, Kanshi Ram in Japan and Sitaram Kesri in Houston, other such leaders also prefer doctors of forward castes in Indian hospitals than any Dalit.

We must do something by which bureaucrats, doctors and engineers from the weaker sections get respectability in society and do not suffer from the inferiority complex of being selected through reservation. •

The TMC leader is trying to reinvent himself as the deliverer of the downtrodden in Tamil Nadu

Karupiah Moopanar hates to take decisions, especially of the political kind. He tends to procrastinate, dragging his feet over crucial political moves, coming to a decision only when he is under pressure. Remember when former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao made a decision to align the Congress party with the Jayalalitha-led AIADMK in 1996? It took Moopanar quite some time to make up his mind. In April 1999, Moopanar put pressure on his MPs not to vote for the BJP government, in a gesture of solidarity towards the Sonia Gandhi-led Congress. But his decision was announced only on the morning of the voting day.

The Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) was formed by Moopanar on the eve of the 1996 state and Lok Sabha elections. The party was announced even before it had been registered with the Election Commission. It was M. Karunanidhi and superstar Rajnikant who effectively did the marketing of the TMC, while the paan-chewing Moopanar had little to say.

After the 1996 elections, Moopanar's TMC became the second biggest party in Tamil Nadu overnight, pushing the AIADMK to the third place. But Moopanar was embarrassed because the Congress, to which his loyalty was unquestionable, had performed abysmally. Congress candidates lost their deposits in all seats they contested in Tamil Nadu. And Moopanar spoilt his chances of becoming the Prime Minister heading the United Front government at the Centre, because he did not play his political cards well.

In an attempt to end the 35-year rule of Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu, Moopanar tried to create a new selling point for the TMC. His agenda was to re-establish Kamaraj's rule (read: Congress with Moopanar as chief minister) by the year 2001 when Assembly elections are due in Tamil Nadu. The other



G.K. MOOPANAR

Messiah

factor is the presence of P. Chidambaram — the former finance minister who is looked upon by the Tamil middle classes as a potential Prime Minister from Tamil Nadu. The rumour making the rounds is that Sonia Gandhi does not like Chidambaram, which Moopanar is obviously trying to cash in on by pushing him to the sidelines.

In the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the seats held by the TMC were reduced from 20 to three, in the wake of a BJP-AIADMK wave. The DMK realised that the TMC had no real grass-roots support. Moopanar reacted sharply by launching an offensive against Karunanidhi's government. Soon Moopanar was functioning as the state unit chief of the Congress(I). By playing second fiddle to Sonia, he had managed to erase the identity of the TMC.

The biggest set-back, for Moopanar

and the TMC, was when superstar Rajnikant started drifting away from the party. Being a Maharashtrian by birth, Rajnikant had a leaning towards the BJP. He tried to persuade Moopanar to support the BJP at the Centre before it fell in April 1999. To no avail. Therefore, in the 1999 elections, Rajnikant and his fans have decided to keep away from poll-related activities — a major blow to Moopanar's support base

Moopanar had tried to sell Sonia Gandhi a pet theory of his — 'isolate AIADMK leader Jayalalitha'. He had suggested that a secular front be formed under the leadership of the Congress which would include the Left, Muslim parties like IUML, Puthiya Tamizhagam and other opponents of the BJP-DMK combine minus the AIADMK. But Sonia and her Tamil Nadu advisors

(read: Mani Shankar Aiyar — an old enemy of Moopanar's) rejected the plan, preferring the time-tested policy of alliance with Jayalalitha.

When even people like Arunachalam, a man he trusted deeply, went back to the Congress and some of his men at the grass-root level crossed over to the AIADMK; Moopanar started thinking of forming a third front in Tamil Nadu. He then spoke to a well-known marketing agency which suggested that he repackage himself as the new 'messiah of the downtrodden', since the 1999 elections would be fought on caste in Tamil Nadu. Moopanar roped in Puthiya Tamizhagam (PT) leader Krishnaswamy, a Naxalite-turned-Dalit leader, who has pockets of influence in southern districts. In the last elections Krishnaswamy's goons had roughed up Arunachalam, then in the TMC. Says Arunachalam, who had lost to Krishnaswamy by over 1 lakh votes, "I do not know what happened to Moopanar. He is so desperate that he has tied up with a criminal element like the PT whose leader is accused in a murder case."

Moopanar is trying to take a leaf out of Kanshi Ram's political career, by try-

Moopanar is trying to take a leaf out of Kanshi Ram's political career by bringing all Dalit parties together under the TMC umbrella. This election, he would be riding piggyback on the Puthiya Tamizhagam

not be a populist move. As Arunachalam asked, "Is the TMC covering itself with glory by associating with a rank casteist outfit like the PT which is slowly emerging as an agricultural mafia in the villages of Tamil Nadu?"

Moopanar's logic is: anything for a non-Dravidian alternative in Tamil Nadu. "The TMC is not really bothered about the 1999 elections," he reveals. "What we are looking at is the 2001 Assembly elections. For that we have to build a third front with the help of secular, Dalit and minority organisations, which I am sure will open a new chapter

in the political firmament of Tamil Nadu". That, however, does not explain why he has offered seats to 'letter-head parties' like the Republican Party of India and Dalit Panthers who have not even recovered their deposits in past elections.

The chances of a TMC-led front in Tamil Nadu does not look too promising at the moment. The relationship between the PT and the TMC had soured somewhat over seat allocation. The PT wanted 12 out of the 39 seats in Tamil Nadu, but the TMC is not willing to part with more than eight. In south Tamil Nadu, a supposed PT stronghold, they wanted to contest from Tenkasi, Tirunelveli and Ramanthapuram which the TMC is not willing to concede. Initially, Moopanar's not talking to him directly about seat-sharing had peeved PT leader Krishnaswamy who felt that "the talks were sabotaged by those in the TMC who had some other agenda". But now talks have been resumed between the two leaders and both sides are hoping that their differences would be sorted out amicably.

Even so, political pundits feel that the new TMC-PT alliance may act only as

Moopanar

ing to bring together all Dalit parties under the TMC umbrella. Riding piggyback on the PT and other Dalit organisations, he thinks, will do the trick just the same way as exploiting Rajnikant's popular support and taking advantage of a sweeping anti-Jayalalitha wave did before. But aligning with the PT may

In the 1999 elections, Rajnikant and his fans have decided to keep away from poll-related activities — a major blow to Moopanar's support base



RAJNIKANT

spoilers in the clash of the other two formidable fronts in Tamil Nadu — the DMK-BJP and the AIADMK-Congress(I). The only TMC leader with chances of retaining his seat is P. Chidambaram at Sivaganga. As for the rest, it will be an uphill task to get back their deposits.

But Moopanar does not seem to be bothered about his party's prospects at the coming Lok Sabha elections. At the moment he has enough to chew on, trying to reinvent himself as a leader of the Dalits. Possibly he has his sights set on the post-election scenario when he will be in a better position to bargain, probably having merged the TMC with the Sonia-led Congress by then. The 1999 polls are sure going to be a turning point for the TMC and Moopanar, its founder •

Sreedhar Pillai/Chennai

In Tamil Nadu, the DMK has been more accomodative towards the BJP than the AIADMK towards its alliance partner, the Congress

DIFFERE

It is a neat role reversal. From being senior partner to accepting terms as a junior colleague has been presented as a fait accompli to party workers who might have otherwise questioned the wisdom of being Mama's Boys. That is exactly what Congressmen have been reduced to in Tamil Nadu after the party accepted the 11 Lok Sabha seats that the AIADMK supremo J. Jayalalitha grudgingly doled out to the Congress. Of course, as an added 'bonus' she left the Pondicherry seat for the Congress, leaving the party with no other option but to accept the terms.

From being the major partner in all Lok Sabha elections fought in alliance with the AIADMK, the Congress has neatly accepted being a minor player in the state and, in the process, underscored the declining fortunes of the party. While the Congress contested 28 seats in 1989 and 1991 and 29 in 1996, leaving the AIADMK with the rest; this time the AIADMK has emerged as the dominant partner and allotted two seats each to the CPI and the CPM, one seat to the Indian National League, besides the 11 left for the Congress.

In contrast, the DMK has been more accomodative towards the BJP while finalising the seat-sharing arrangement. Despite the fact that the BJP in the state is of recent vintage and the party needs the shoulders of at least one major Dravidian party to fire its missiles from, the DMK has not only allowed the party to recontest the majority of seats it contested in 1998, but has also provided it with an extra seat. In ways more than one, this is indicative of the contrasting attitude of the two major Dravidian parties towards their national allies.

But it is not only in terms of numerical dominance that the AIADMK has sought to highlight its role as the 'leader' of the front. Rather, it is also in



Congressmen in Tamil Nadu have been reduced to Mama's Boys after the party accepted the 11 Lok Sabha seats doled out to them by AIADMK supremo J. Jayalalitha

NT STROKES



terms of the seats that have been left for the Congress that Jayalalitha has made it clear that she is in the driver's seat all the way. Of the 11 seats left for the BJP, only one — Arakkonam — had seen the AIADMK candidate emerging victorious in 1998. Another two — Vandavasi and Tindivanam — were bagged by its

allies MDMK and PMK, and have long been considered to be firm territories for the fringe Dravidian parties that have aligned with the DMK this time in the National Democratic Alliance.

True, there were hiccups in the DMK-led front also. The protracted negotiations between DMK and MDMK and the denial of ticket to the PMK leader and former Union minister Dalit Ezhimalai were embarrassments that the BJP could have done without. But as a senior BJP leader K. Jana Krishnamurthi explained, "It was natural that parties with a common support base would jockey among themselves during talks regarding seat distribution. But we are satisfied with the approach the DMK adopted towards us."

Barring Mani Shankar Aiyar there would be few Congressmen who would breathe easy following the seat distribution by 'Madam'. Having won from Mayiladuturai in 1991, he nursed his constituency like few MPs before him and this paid dividends in 1998 when despite being an independent candidate he polled close to 73,000 votes. What



K.J. Krishnamurthi: "We are satisfied with the approach the DMK adopted towards us"

gives him an added advantage is the fact that the seat was won for the last two times by the TMC with the PMK emerging as the runner up in 1998. With the drift in the TMC support palpable and the PMK joining the NDA bandwagon, Aiyar can expect to have a head start. That is if Sonia Gandhi ignores the rule created by her of denying tickets to leaders who have been defeated twice in succession.

The BJP has been allowed to retain Coimbatore, Trichapalli and Nilgiris where it had won last time. This is in addition to the Nagercoil where the party was within striking distance to the TMC that finally won the seat. Even the additional seat that has been allotted to the BJP is Sivaganga, the pocket borough of P. Chidambaram for long. While the AIADMK left the seat for the Congress because the AIADMK does not have a very good base and lost by a big margin in 1998, the DMK has allotted the seat to the BJP with the intention of enabling the party to benefit from the split in Chidambaram's vote bank.

For the Congress, things are not going to be easy in any of the other seats either. Even in Chennai, for instance. Keeping in mind that the AIADMK has won the three seats in the state capital only once, the AIADMK has conveniently allotted all the three seats to its partners. While Congress has been given Chennai South, CPM has been allotted Chennai North and the INL has been left to slug it out in Chennai Central. Despite being a Congress stronghold once and electing stalwarts like T.T. Krishnamachari and R. Venkataratnam, Chennai South has seen the Congress slipping badly since the 1980s. Barring Vijayanthirala Balu, the last Congress leader to be elected in 1989, nobody from the Congress has done well. The seat, won by the DMK last time, had the added advantage of the main challenge coming from the BJP whose veteran leader Jana Krishnamurthi gave T.R. Balu a good run for the money.

Of the seats allotted to the Congress,



Most leaders
Aiyar stands a
good chance in
the wake of a
drift in the TMC
support base
provided he can
shed the image
of being hostile
to people who
have been
defeated twice in
succession



it has had prominent leaders in the recent past only in Sivaganga (P. Chidambaram) besides Chennai South and Mayiladuturai. The other seats have not elected either very many Congress leaders since the 1980s or their profile has not been high enough to warrant national attention. It is thus evident that the AIADMK is not only trying to keep a check on the number of possible Congress MPs from the state but also ensuring that very few of them have the stature to emerge as important leaders representing the interests of the state. It is a clever ploy of killing the proverbial two birds with one stone.

Of the seats left for the Congress, the case of Tindivanam, Chidambaram and Vandavasi are among the most curious. The Congress last won the seats in 1989 and 1991, both times there was a 'wave situation' in favour of the AIADMK-Congress alliance. In 1996, while TMC won Vandavasi, the DMK bagged Tindivanam and Chidambaram. In all the constituencies, the PMK, which contested the elections without aligning with either of the two main fronts, polled a significant number of votes. In 1998, the AIADMK had not contested these seats and instead allotted them to the PMK and the MDMK that won the seats with their candidates defeating the TMC and DMK nominees. By allotting the two seats to the Congress, the AIADMK has

admitted that its unit in the three constituencies has been dormant for long and the party leadership is not sure of wresting them from the PMK and MDMK (already allotted seats by the DMK). There is thus no option for the Congress but to start with little to hope for except another 'wave situation' in favour of the AIADMK-led front, as it alone appears to be in a position to ensure victory of Congress candidates from Tamil Nadu.

The case of allotting Nilgiris to the Congress is also perplexing because this was one seat where the Congress was challenged by the Swatantra Party even before the advent of the united DMK as a powerful electoral force. In recent years, this seat has seen the steady rise of the BJP from the early 1990s and in 1991, the party polled a significant number of votes. In 1998, the BJP won the seat with its candidate defeating the TMC candidate by a comfortable margin. Though the Congress candidate R. Prabhu polled a fair number of votes, the Congress would not have an easy battle as the TMC candidate is expected to cut into the anti-BJP vote.

In contrast to the seats allotted to the Congress, the two communist parties have reasons to feel beholden to the AIADMK as they have been given seats where the party has had a fair presence over the years. For instance, Nagapattinam won by the CPI in 1998 has seen the

party having a large vote base from the 1950s. This survived through the decades and the party has just needed a helping hand from one of the two Dravidian parties to win the seat.

Similarly, the CPM has been a strong wicket in Madurai. Though the party has won the seat just once in 1967 (and once by the united CPI in 1957), the CPM has polled a steady vote share since the 1970s. In 1977, 1980 and 1984, the party polled close to 40 per cent votes while closer in 1991, it polled close to 30 per cent. In fact, even in 1998 the party candidate polled nearly 17 per cent votes despite not having an alliance with any major front.

While it is true that elections are not contested on the drawing board and the situation on the ground often turns out to be different from what appears to be the case when campaign begins. But for the moment the dice appears to be loaded against the Congress. It is evident that this 'Maina' would like its prodigy not to be a 'Big Boy' this time. In contrast, the DMK has not tried to impose its regional hegemony over the BJP and has even been fairly encouraging in its efforts to provide the BJP with a permanent toehold in the state where it has taken the longest for the party to make inroads into. •

Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay/New Delhi

Scandalous Decline

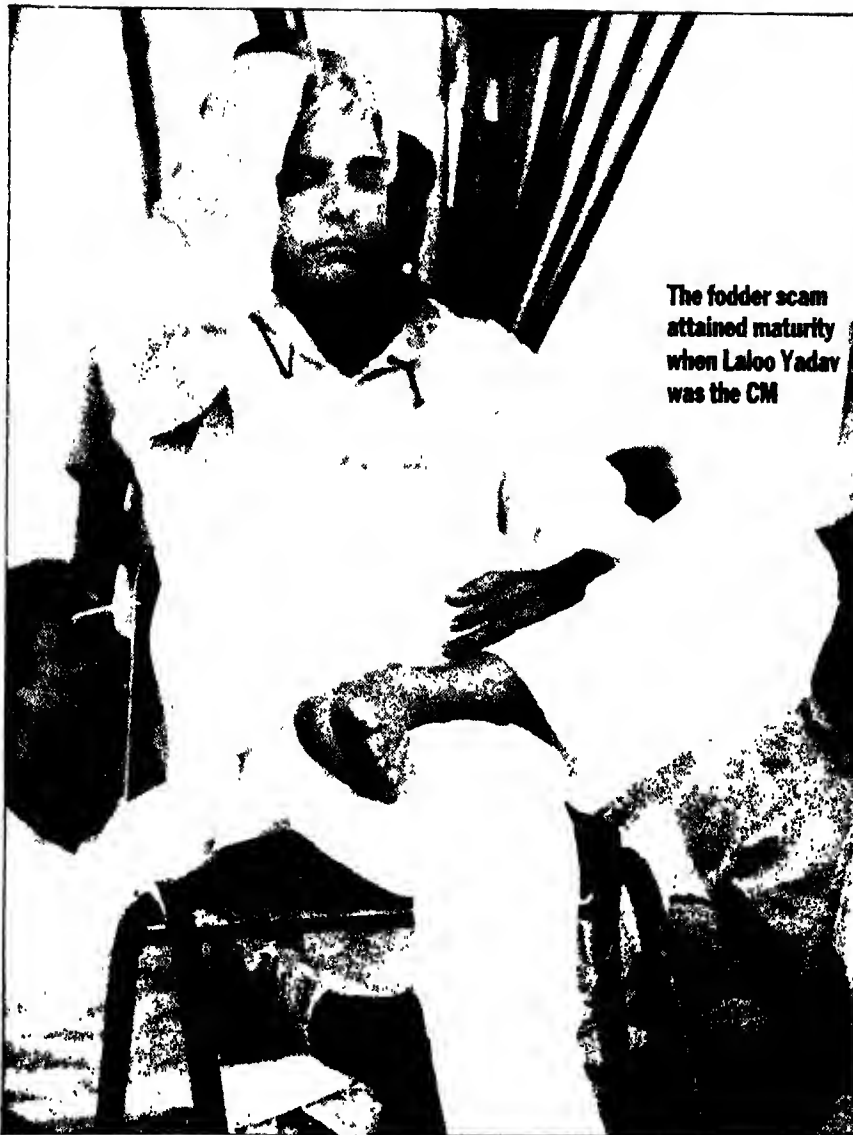
Bihar's murky slide into a state of scams

No invading army could have done it better — or worse, if you please — than what its own people have managed to do to Bihar over the years. It's a long, sordid tale of systematic plunder that began soon after Independence. Scams came to be the order of the day. They thrived, sustained by an unholy nexus: the politician-bureaucrat link. But then, secrecy was still the watchword. It was after March 1990, that the lid was blown off. The Janata Dal had come to power in the state and a low-profile Laloo Prasad Yadav had become the chief minister. A change of guard upsets even the smoothest operatives. So, gone was the cloak of secrecy. No longer were things under wraps. Now, it was a brazen parade of megascams — one after another.

The slide, as certified by the National Sample Survey (NSS), became a 'down-hill gallop'. According to NSS data, before 1990, 40 per cent of the state's population lived below the poverty line. The figure's now gone up to more than 50 per cent. Burdened by unnecessary expenditure and government-abetted scams, Bihar, today, is saddled with a debt-figure that crosses Rs 10,000 crore. Here's a low-down on the various scams that have so far come to light

The Animal Husbandry Department Scam (aka The Fodder Scam)

The scam was detected on 20 January, 1996, by the then Chaibasa DC, Amit Khare. There is a dispute over the exact figure, but sources believe it has crossed Rs 1,500 crore. Two of the accused are two former chief ministers: Jagannath Mishra and Laloo Prasad Yadav. Born



The fodder scam attained maturity when Laloo Yadav was the CM

in the Congress regime, the scam attained maturity when Laloo Yadav was the chief minister. After BJP's Sushil Modi, leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, and Samata Party's (now in RJD) Shivanand Tiwari filed public interest litigations before the Patna High Court which ordered a CBI enquiry, the state government retaliated by challenging the high court order in the Supreme Court. But the apex court not only rejected its plea, it also ordered that the division Bench of the Patna High Court, comprising Justice S.N. Jha and Justice S.J. Mukhopadhyay, would monitor the CBI probe and ask the investigating agency to submit an Action Taken Report (ATR) from time to time.

Sources say that Laloo has known about the scam since 1977, soon after he was elected MP from the Chhapra parliamentary constituency. In 1989, as leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, he even played a key role in getting Dr Ram Raj Ram, one of the accused, appointed director of the animal husbandry department. Later, when Laloo became the CM, the Request Committee report saying that a scam was on and the CBI should probe it was never tabled in the House. When the vigilance department lodged a case (No. 34/90) regarding irregularities, Laloo got Ram's name struck off.

In 1992, income tax officials raided several people believed to be constituents of the scam cartel. Besides unaccounted for wealth and property, a diary was also seized. Again, the powerful CM ensured that no action was taken. Not only that, several top scamsters like the kingpin Shyam Bihari Sinha, R.K. Das, G.N. Sharma and Indrabhan were given extensions. From time to time, people like Rajo Singh, the BJP MLA, Druv Bhagat and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) chairman and Congress MLA Jagdish Sharma—who helped the mafiosi in siphoning off money from the state's treasury—would write to Laloo requesting him to grant extensions to various doctors and officials involved in the scam. And the CM complied.

To make things easier, the monthly non-plan allotment ceiling of eight per cent for the animal husbandry department was abolished. Another proof of Laloo's complicity is evident from the fact that after IT officials raided a supplier, Dayanand Kashyap's house in 1993, Laloo went ahead to nominate him chairman of the 20-point program-

me working committee, Ranchi district. With that, Kashyap was bestowed the status of a state minister.

Today, not much has changed. If the state government tried to scuttle the CBI probe by filing a special leave petition (SLP) in the Supreme Court, then, of late, several co-accused have died under mysterious circumstances. Then, efforts to bring a motion against CBI Joint-Director (east) U.N. Biswas continue. Biswas is 'considered guilty' of trying to seek the army's help to arrest Laloo Yadav after it was clear that the district administration was unwilling to help the CBI. Of a total 48 cases lodged, charge-sheets have been filed in only 24. Trial has commenced in only one case which is not directly related to the scam. Due to the delay in filing of the charge-sheets,

were purchased, 84 kilometres of new roads were constructed, 138 km widened and 2,000 km repaired. In the period 1994-95, the amount purchased was 94,000 metric tonnes, but only six kilometres of new road were laid out and 1,300 kilometres repaired. It's also worth noting that while in 1990-91 it cost Rs 16 crore to construct 84 kms of new road, 19.98 crores were spent after ten kilometres in 1995-96.

Further, in the account books, there is no entry regarding purchase of bitumen worth Rs 59.63 crore. Similarly, in the 19 zones that come under the road construction department, Rs 62.63 crore worth of bitumen was bought from petroleum companies and the payment never registered. CBI probes revealed that in most cases, no delivery of bitumen was



On 21 April, 1998, income tax department officials raided as many as 65 premises, including the official residence of Illiyas Hussain

the accused in the fodder scam are being released on bail, one by one.

So, till charge-sheets in all the cases are filed and the trial begins, not much can be said other than stating the obvious: that the treasury has indeed been looted.

Bitumen Scam

The amount involved adds up to Rs 289 crore, though sources say that it could exceed Rs 500 crore. In 1990-91, when 44,650 metric tonnes of bitumen

made despite requisition. What it points to is a clear nexus among engineers, bureaucrats, transporters and politicians.

Before 1990, that is before Laloo Yadav became the CM, the petroleum companies supplying bitumen used to do so through their own transporters. In 1990, the state government abolished the system and without any advertisement or tenders, started appointing transporters. And since requisition for bitumen has to come through the finance ministry, and Laloo also held the finance portfolio his involvement in this scam too cannot be ruled out.

The road construction department minister Illiyas Hussain had stated in the Assembly that from the period 1990-91 to 1994-95, 2,21,000 metric tonnes of

bitumen were purchased. On the other hand, the petroleum and natural gas ministry director, Sunil Uke's letter (P21019/21/96) states that during this period, 3,14,000 metric tonnes of bitumen were supplied to Bihar. Thus, 93,000 metric tonnes of bitumen worth Rs 49 crore was misappropriated.

The matter was handed over to the CBI by the Patna High Court Division Bench comprising the then Chief Justice, D.P. Wadhwa, and Justice S.J. Mukhopadhyay on the PIL filed by Sushil Kumar Modi on 20 February, 1997. All together 53 FIRs have been registered in connection with the bitumen scam. Except for parliamentary questioning, no accused has been arrested nor has the CBI filed any charge-sheet. The scam is being probed by CBI teams from Patna,

Burdened by unnecessary expenditure and government-abetted scams, Bihar today is saddled with a debt-figure that crosses Rs 10,000 crore

ed by the then revenue and land reforms minister, Inder Singh Namdhari, on 17 June, 1996. It involved more than 200 acres of government-owned (*Khuas Mahal*) urban land that was fraudulently allotted, on a permanent basis, to several

ed absolute ownership.

In his report Bardhan said that the scam had started in 1965. And most of the deputy commissioners and divisional commissioners, who maintained a studied silence while the malpractice went on unabated, were receiving kickbacks. Bardhan had pin-pointed that nine DCs, who had been posted in Ranchi during the last two decades, had illegally transferred land owned by tribals in as many as 196 cases.

After 1993, the illegal transfer of both government and tribal-owned land gained momentum when the state government started receiving proposals that the land could be converted into free-holding land and sold either to the people who were occupying it or in the free market. Incidentally, Laloo Yadav, too, had declared that the government-owned fallow and prime land would be turned into free-holding land. Sources believed that this happened after the state government discovered that a number of highrises had come up on the government-owned land.

In 1992, the revenue department had sent a reminder to the Cabinet for approval to free the lands from the clutches of individuals and societies. The government chose to ignore it. Sources in Ranchi told SUNDAY that the papers related to the survey of 1935 have been destroyed and from the Ranchi Collectorate, 235 pages of Register II are missing.

Interestingly, several persons accused in the fodder scam have been beneficiaries of the land scam in Ranchi. A prime accused in the fodder scam, Dayanand Kashyap, procured 21 acres of prime land through his Hill View Housing Society. Similarly, Dipesh Chandak, another accused who has decided to turn approver in the fodder scam, owns an acre of land on which his father Mahavir Chandak has a factory. Incidentally, this land belonged to a tribal named Mahavir Munda. Under the Scheduled Area Regulation Act, no non-tribal can purchase or lease land belonging to a tribal. The matter of Munda, like many other cases, went to the Scheduled Area Regulation Court. Even when the litigation was decided in Munda's favour, no action was taken to free the land.

Medicine Scam

The amount involved in this health department scam comes up to about Rs 300 crore. Medicines meant to be distributed free among the needy were allotted



Ranchi and Dhanbad. The Patna team has 35 cases, the Ranchi team has eight while the Dhanbad unit has ten cases to probe into.

On 21 April, 1998, income tax department officials raided as many as 65 premises, including the official residence of Illiyas Hussain. Though several documents were recovered, the golden catch proved to be the recovery of Rs 28 lakh kept in a gunny bag from the house of Hussain's private secretary Shahabuddin Baig. But none of the accused has been arrested and no charge-sheet, even interim, has been filed.

Land Scam

The Rs 400-crore scam was unearth-

Brij Bihari Prasad, main accused in the BECEE scam, was killed on 13 June last year

housing societies and individuals. "The then special secretary, Ashok Bardhan, found that out of the total 21 cases put up before him for investigation, 11 were true on the face-value itself. Bardhan submitted his report regarding the remaining ten cases in August 1996 to the state government. According to his report, the settlements were a gross violation of the rules which specified that though the land is neither fallow nor prime, it can be leased but under no circumstances can be transferred. Investigations revealed that several housing societies and individuals had been granted

ed to various hospitals. Massive irregularities were also detected in the purchase of medicines. Before 1982, medicines were allotted through the health department which, in turn, were distributed by respective health officials. The medicines were procured from the central government's medical store depot (MSD) in Calcutta. The civil surgeon and district health officer used to send the requisition which was countersigned by the health department's deputy director.

But, under a well-planned conspiracy in January 1982, a letter (No.170, dated 27.01.82) regarding the purchase of medicine was issued. This letter contained no directive regarding the countersignature of the deputy director or anything about the control exercised by the health department. Taking advantage of the 'vague' letter, several health officials posted in various districts of Bihar directly ordered medicines from MSD, Calcutta, even when they had no authority to do so. Once the medicines arrived, it was sold in the open market, thus lining the pockets of many.

The worst affected district has been Dumka in south Bihar. Here, health officials after having misused the funds meant for purchase of medicines, sent the MSD, Calcutta, an order for medicines worth Rs 5.28 crore. It was the then DDC, Dumka, B.K. Pathak, who unearthed the scam. He found that medicines worth Rs 3.2 crore had been misappropriated during the period 1990-95, when Laloo Yadav was the CM. Dumka civil surgeon Dr R.S. Singh was considered very close to the former CM. Interestingly, he wrote a letter to the state government on 18 November, 1993, seeking permission to file cases against the erring health officials. The permission was denied.

According to sources, the MSD, Calcutta, besides sending medicines to Dumka, also sent medicines worth Rs 103 crore, though only on paper. And Rs 120 crore was withdrawn fraudulently from the treasury on the plea that medicines had to be bought. Nothing of course was purchased. The state government's attitude from the very beginning has been lackadaisical. Even when the then health minister, Sudha Srivastav, on 16 March, 1994, recommended a CBI probe through the File No 10/Purchase/1.3.92, the chief minister chose to ignore it. It was only in July 1996, that a reluctant Laloo Yadav ordered a CBI probe. However, it is alleged that the for-

mer CM exerted pressure on the Union government to stop the home ministry from issuing the required notification to the CBI. As a result, the CBI is yet to begin its investigation.

Forest Scam

Between 1981 and 1991, pesticides and polythene goods were purchased but only on paper. Similar was the case with the forest plantation scheme in which Rs 100 crore was misappropriated. The scam came to light in 1993 and, after preliminary investigations between 22 November 1994 and 30 June 1995, 18 FIRs were lodged.

Considering the seriousness of the scam, the vigilance department

vigilance department would take action. But then, Laloo took things in his own hands and ordered that status quo be maintained. All this was done to keep the scam under wraps.

Since 16 August, 1995, no action has been taken against the errant forest officials and files related to the scam lie unattended till date.

Forest Development Corporation Scam

This scam was unearthed by none other than Laloo Yadav himself. But he did not taking any action against the culprits. On 12 December, 1995, Janata Dal MLC Tanwir Hassan said in the Legislative Council that a scam of Rs 50 crore



CBI Joint-Director (east) U.N. Biswas was accused of seeking the army's help to arrest Laloo Yadav

inspector-general of police recommended a CBI probe on 8 June, 1995. Though the then CM, Laloo Yadav, signed the related file agreeing to the recommendation, the matter was never handed over to the CBI. Constant obstruction from the forest department employees forced the vigilance department to approach the CM who, in turn, called a high-level meeting on 16 August, 1995, which was attended by the chief secretary, vigilance commissioner, vigilance director-general of police, forest secretary and the chief conservator of forests.

It was decided that the vigilance department will not arrest any accused for a month and subsequently the forest department will ask all the absconding officials and employees to return to work where they would have to clear the situation. And after a month, when the chief minister gave the clearance, the

had been detected in the Forest Development Corporation. LC chairman Prof. Jabir Hussain ordered an enquiry on 17 January, 1996. In his order (No. 1338), Hussain said that the then managing director, Prem Sharan, and other top officials should be held guilty and accordingly FIRs should be filed against them. But no stringent action was taken against anyone. The corporation officials were charged with fraudulent purchase of seeds worth Rs 60 lakh and illegal felling of teak worth Rs 40 crore.

Bihar Engineering Competitive Entrance Examination (BECEE) Scam

The CBI is probing the scam and had also arrested the now-deceased former science and technology minister Brij Bihari Prasad on 4 April, 1998, under

various sections of the IPC and the Prevention of Corruption Act in Case No. RC438/97.

It was on 17 July, 1997, that the Patna High Court ordered a CBI probe into the affair after examining the writ petition of two 'failed' examinees, Arun Kumar from Jehanabad and Pramod Dokania from Bhagalpur. The court constituted a special committee on 30 August, 1996 to probe the matter. It was through this committee's enquiry that the matter came to light. During the BECEE which was held on 30 June, 1996, blank answer-sheets were submitted by 'privileged' examinees which were later filled up by learned 'examinees'. Interestingly, the

In the BECE exams held on 30 June, 1996, blank answer-sheets were submitted by 'privileged' examinees which were later filled up by learned 'examinees'.

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Though 1,100 candidates had qualified, the Patna High Court cancelled the registration of 245 examinees. These candidates were charged with clearing the examination after having paid anything between Rs 3 and 5 lakh. The CBI has lodged cases against 250 persons in this connection. Though the probe is now almost a year old, no charge-sheet has been filed. The CBI has also remained silent over the murder of Brij Bihari Prasad who was the main accused. Prasad was killed on 13 June last year inside the premises of the hospital where he was undergoing treatment while in judicial custody. It has been pointed out that with Prasad's murder the entire scam has 'lost its punch'. Legal experts, however, believe that even when the



On 12 December, 1995, Janata Dal MLC Tanwir Hassan said in the Legislative Council that a scam of Rs 50 crore had been detected in the Forest Development Corporation. LC chairman Prof. Jabir Hussain (above) ordered an enquiry on 17 January, 1996

prime accused is no more, the case and the probe should continue keeping the other accused persons in view.

Coal Supply Scam

This scam was unearthed by Brij Bihari Prasad Prasad, before he was murdered, had spoken to SUNDAY at length and had said that the scam had been going on since 1993. He had accused the Coal India Limited (CIL) of defrauding the Bihar State Electricity Board (BSEB) of crores of rupees by supplying inferior quality coal which not only damaged the thermal power plants but also drove them on the verge of closure.

Prasad had pointed out that the BSEB was losing Rs 2 crore daily since 1993. The total money involved in the scam comes to around Rs 6,200 crore. The CIL has been charged with supplying 'G'-grade coal and even plain stone chips instead of the 'D'-grade coal which is required in thermal power plants.

Prasad, who was then science and technology minister, came across a railway rake filled with black stone chips instead of coal. The samples were tested in Bangalore's Central Power Research Institute and the results were startling. The useful heat value (UHV) of coal worked out to a meagre 733 kcal per kg, whereas the required UHV should have

been 4,200 kcal per kg if the coal was 'D'-grade. This explained everything. Prasad had then revealed to SUNDAY that the CIL had been paid Rs 8,640 crore for very bad quality coal and even the stone chips. But, as usual, nothing much has been done so far and the culprits remain at large.

Uniform Purchase Scam

This has nothing to do with politicians. It is basically the CBI versus the police. The CBI has filed charge-sheets against top police officials in the state in Case No. RC44(A)/96 which was filed after a Rs 87-lakh scam was detected. The case was filed in Dumka district and involved misappropriation of funds for the purchase and supply of police uniforms.

The scam — where either the supply of uniforms, socks and blankets, etc., was made only on paper or it was of the most inferior quality — came to light in 1986. Involved are top police officials. The government had ordered a CBI probe in 1986 and ten years later in 1996 the CBI filed charge-sheets in five matters. Now, five officials are on bail. Interestingly, instead of being punished, some errant police officials have been promoted and are holding responsible and sensitive posts in the government. •

Naved Zahir/Patna

The anti-dam lobby has big names on its side. But parched Gujarat still needs water. What is the solution?

A visual aberration. That's what greets you at the Kataria village in the Lakhtar tehsil in Saurashtra. Something is amiss. There is no pond — no kids splashing around, no women gossiping as they wash clothes, no clutter of utensils being washed. Instead, there are queues of villagers with grim and exhausted faces. They have gathered to get their basic necessity, water from tanks provided by the civic authorities. They are wholly dependent on monsoons.

With the season almost over before it started, there's despair in their eyes. It's a near-drought situation. Sixty per cent of the crops have failed. Says Kantaben, "If it does not rain in a week's time, we

precious to be used to maintain cleanliness. Lalu Bhai Gadhavi, the *sarpanch*, dismisses the role of political parties. Their only hope is Narmada.

Have they heard of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)? Of Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy? A youngster acknowledges: "I've seen Medha Patkar on Zee TV." An elder immediately curses Medha. "Why does not she visit us and see for herself? Even we have to migrate seasonally to cities during summers. Our womenfolk and kids spend their entire day fetching water."

To them, the plight of the displaced tribals and residents of villages that will be submerged is just one side of reality. A teenager quips: "I'm really for *jal samarpan*. But first get the river water to

The other side of big dams

shall lose all our crops." They have already incurred debts to buy seeds and fertilizers. Without the harvest, they shall be penniless.

In neighbouring villages, children find it difficult to walk. The reason, excess fluorides in drinking water, resulting in dental and skeletal fluorosis. In Sangani village, an unbelievable sight greets us. Villagers are dependent on a tiny man-made cave where the groundwater seeps through the walls. "Our kids don't go to school. They take turns to collect water in utensils as buckets cannot be used. It takes over an hour to fill a bucket," says Yadav Bhai Rathore.

At Navamadam, it's the same story. As we talk to the villagers, a girl, barely seven, makes futile attempt to wipe out a stain off her dress with muddy water from the only well in the village. The well is drying up and has started stinking. Of the six hand pumps in the village, only three are functional. Cholera strikes every now and then. Water is too

my village."

Government officials express their helplessness. The dams are dry. Be it the Nayka dam near Surendra Nagar or the Bhadar dam near Rajkot, it's the same story everywhere. The story of failed monsoons. Bitter memories of three consecutive years of droughts in 1986, 1987 and 1988 still haunt these 12 million people when water sold in the streets of Rajkot, after being transported by trains from Gandhinagar.

Today, Rajkot with its seven-lakh population gets drinking water once in six days. Tankers are the daily source of water. Every cubic metre of water provided by tanks cost Rs 80-90 and the sources are usually private farmers who trade water for a few favours. Often these sources are 45-50 kms away from the villages.

Throughout the year, department officials try to trace water by drilling and boring. Once the sources are identified,



File picture of a drought-prone Gujarat: looking forward to Narmada water

the pipes have to be laid extensively to supply to cities and villages. The costs are exorbitant. Each project involves crores of rupees. The Eighth Plan allotted Rs 373 crores for provision of drinking water to the state and additional Rs 484 crore had to be spent. Officials are racing against time as the remaining sources will dry up within a month. The irony is that the new sources will be temporary.

The sources dry up every third year on an average because of the rocky terrain where the groundwater cannot percolate. As a result, levels drop. "Ten years ago, open wells were 18 to 20 metres deep. Today a 35-40-metre-deep well is dry. We have to bore wells to a depth of 200-300 metres," explains some officials of the water supply department. With a coastline of 1,600 km, it's



HIGH AND DRY

- Rajkot receives water supply just once in six days.
- The water table has gone down to 200-300 metre depth in the waterbowl of north Gujarat.
- Dental and skeletal fluorosis is claiming victims in some villages due to lack of potable water.
- 14,000 villages exist without any permanent source of drinking water.
- The encroaching desert is gradually claiming areas in Mehsana and Banaskantha districts.
- The advancing Rann of Kutch is threatening to render Kutch and Surendra Nagar districts barren.
- Till march 1998, Rs 6,639 crore had already been spent on the SS8. •

JAGDISH YADAV

NBA activists proclaim that big dams are not built for providing drinking water. But in the drought-prone Saurashtra region, there is no other alternative. Mass prayers are held every day for a downpour. The younger lot has golden dreams — once the Narmada water arrives, they'll be rich

an ideal setting for 'water water everywhere not a drop to drink.'

Is there a solution? The government claims so. The Wonder Canal. The Narmada Canal (460-km-long) will feed the Saurashtra Branch Canal (SBC) which is just one of such 42 branches taking off from it. The Saurashtra region is like an inverted saucer. Hence the SBC has a rising ground to traverse before it trails off. The SBC water will thus have to be pumped and supplied through pipe-

lines to 4,877 villages and 90 cities in Saurashtra. The water will irrigate 4.56 lakh hectare area in the three districts of Surendra Nagar, Bhavnagar and Rajkot. Kutch too will receive water for drinking and irrigation purposes.

The plan sounds simple but the very magnitude of the task is boggling. NBA activists proclaim that big dams are not built for provision of drinking water. But in these regions, there is no other alternative. Already dams built solely for irrigation purposes are being sourced

for drinking water

Is the crisis really this acute? Says Malti Ben, a citizen of Rajkot. "I'm finding it difficult to get a bride for my son. Who wants his daughter to be running after water all her life?" The villages are worse off. Their cattle have to be fed as well. Mass prayer are held every day for a downpour. The younger lot has golden dreams — once the Narmada water arrives, they'll be rich

NBA activists allege that the water will be siphoned off by industries before





Medha Patkar with NBA activists: small is beautiful

it reaches the village. The government officials produce a sheet of figures to counter this allegation. And thus it goes on. But one can't afford to tire of it. Too many lives are at stake.

The issue is no longer a case of argument in favour or against the greater common good. It's a question of human suffering. No one likes being uprooted. But neither does one 'live' if he has to survive battling odds all his life. You cannot wish away the suffering of others to highlight your cause. For a balanced view, you have to go for a reconnaissance of the entire land.

The plight of the inhabitants of villages to be submerged is to be seen to be believed. Relief and rehabilitation cannot ensure their cultural and social bindings will remain intact. One cannot compensate their loss. To make it worse, some landlords in south Gujarat are selling their infertile land to the government to be dished out to the tribals and marginal farmers. Corruption is rampant. It is difficult to pardon such practices or overlook such issues.

Somewhere there is a certain inhuman element in our attitude to human suffering endured by the people facing submergence as well as villages going without water. NBA activists doubting the benefits that will flow from the project is

understandable. But denying the benefits altogether is a little immature. They believe that filling of village tanks by Narmada water has no meaning as the tanks are already being filled by monsoon flows. They must realise that some of these areas fall in the rain-shadow area and the tanks are not replenished at times for years in a row. Says Munniben of Majott village: "The last time I saw the village tank filled to half its capacity was two years back."

But the government's smug attitude towards rehabilitation and relief through compensation in cash and kind reflects an indifference that is equally hard to digest. Pro-dam activists propound the theory of greater common good; the NBA activists declare small is beautiful. Their energy to protest or lobby is remarkable. But instead of dis-

The issue is no longer a case of argument in favour or against the greater common good. It's a question of human suffering. No one likes being uprooted

mantling dam by dam, one could perhaps be a little more constructive. A village by village study in Saurashtra region would reveal a different truth. Small dams and large dams are not substitutes. For arid areas as in Gujarat, where every drop of water has to be utilised, the ideal approach is an integrated one—for planning of major, medium and minor check dams, percolation tanks and groundwater.

Of the Rs 5,000 crore earmarked for the provision of drinking water, Rs 2,200 crore have already been allotted for the Ninth Plan period. Institutional finance is being arranged. The delay just adds to the cost.

NBA activists hold governmental mismanagement of rehabilitation primarily responsible for this delay. But local journalists allege it is the activists who obstruct rehabilitation work.

It is difficult to arrive at the truth under these circumstances. One cannot afford to take sides. At the recent rally, a popular slogan was: "Paani chahiye, Pepsi Nahin". Perhaps they heard it, for when we visited the drought-prone villages, all they could offer us to drink was Pepsi. Marie Antoinette should have announced a copyright. The uncanny similarity really haunts. •

Devdatta Das/Rajkot

Catch-24

DD's round-the-clock channels will probably show more of the same thing



It was a glittering press lunch at a five-star hotel to announce the launch of DD's two 24-hour channels. The 24-hour news channel, however, was to have a soft launch.

I suppose DD's news being what it is. There was much talk of TRPs to prove that DD was the highest-rated, statistically that is, and with its vast terrestrial reach satellites can offer no competition whatsoever. We were shown a promotional video which was a rehash of DD's old formula — soaps, film-based programmes, mythologicals (most of them seen before or still running), chat shows (though not of the class of those on satellite channels), and what DD always quaintly labelled 'current affair' which made it sound suspiciously like an affair. So much for revolutionary new programmes.

What was not so proudly brandished, in spite of new digital and other technical wonders, was what new faces, ideas and indeed programmes DD had planned for this hasty eve of elections bonanza by Pramod Mahajan who had gone on record like Indira Gandhi to state that DD was a government organisation and should remain one. Not even the 50 per cent autonomy, which Prasar Bharati board member B.G. Verghese said was all that it had been given, seems safe at the moment. Meanwhile, the Election Commission had made it clear that political pressures on the media are not to be entertained. And Prasar Bharati announced that it has a complaints officer in the form of DG News of All India Radio to look into such complaints. No government has yet resisted the temptation of misusing the media by direct calls to AIR and DD's newsrooms. Since this is usually done verbally and on the phone, little can be done by news editors who resist such pressure. It remains to be seen how effective it can be this time.

However, to come back to software for the 24-hour channels, the joke going

round the Capital is: first, retired and sub-standard newscasters will read DD's bulletins for 24 hours instead of going to sleep at midnight, after which everything will be canned anyway. Second, that in the absence of any talent-scouting of its own, DD is going down on its knees to established anchors from the satellite channels such as STAR, Zee and the new avatar of the BBC and offering

ing with them to realise that DD was much more widespread than the satellite channels, especially in smaller towns and areas outside of the metros. Certainly, I remember the news item of the village woman who had bought a washing machine after watching the ads on TV and was operating it beside the village well since she had no water on tap. She confessed she had saved up and bought



At the launch it was not clear what new faces, ideas and indeed programmes DD had planned for this hasty eve-of-elections bonanza by minister of broadcasting Pramod Mahajan

them programmes right and left. There is a regular bonanza going on, so that in future we shall see Vir Sanghvi, Karan Thapar et al not only on the BBC, STAR etc but also on DD.

Meanwhile, the cable operators are saying that without proper equipment they cannot carry DD's new technical wonders. And this after the CEO of Prasar Bharati said at the press conference that the diktat about cable operators compulsorily carrying at least two DD channels might be extended to their being forced to carrying them on prime bands if they did not behave. He was rather more soft with the advertisers, almost plead-

ing the washing machine because she had seen it advertised on TV. And one is sure there are more like her who will also be sold on DD which she had seen terrestrially.

There is a moral in this somewhere. Except that Prasar Bharati member B.G. Verghese added at the press conference that commercial interest should not take precedence over public service broadcasting. And that everyone seemed to have forgotten the radio, which has tremendous possibilities with the upsurge of frequency modulation, which has now also been thrown open to the private sector. •

Rough court

Tension prevails over the captaincy of the Indian Davis Cup team

Six years ago, Jaideep Mukherjea stepped into the shoes of his senior, Naresh Kumar. When the latter retired as non-playing captain of the Indian Davis Cup squad, he had beaten several contenders and was regarded a good choice. But six wins in 13 outings — all on home courts — finally convinced the authorities that a change was needed.

In all probability, when India begins the next Davis Cup campaign in February 2000, a new man would be leading the team. By present indication, it could be former player Ramesh Krishnan, son of the legendary Ramanathan who was the first player to put India in the big league.

Relations between the captain and the administration have not always been smooth. There were occasions when Naresh Kumar had offered to resign. Although he was persuaded to return, he finally withdrew in 1993.

Jaideep, however, had developed a good working relationship with All India Tennis Association chief R.K. Khanna and all was well till last year. Over the past few months, however, there have been developments both in Calcutta and Delhi resulting in tension on the two fronts.

RK's son Anil Khanna, who is in charge of Davis Cup affairs, feels that a decision could only be taken after consultation with the two leading players, Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi. This is a good move since the captain has to be able to interact well with the players at every stage.

It seems strange that the line taken by AITA is that there are differences between Leander and Jaideep. That appears to be the reason why a change at the helm is in the offing. But Jaideep feels that this excuse is far-fetched because Leander virtually grew up at Calcutta's South Club where Jaideep himself had a hand in the development of his skills. Although Leander was groomed under the Vijay Amritraj BAT scheme, the South Club has always been his anchor.

Added to this was the close relationship that developed between Jaideep and Leander. Things seemed to move even closer when a personal bondage



Jaideep Mukherjea and Leander Paes: falling out?

Jaideep Mukherjea has stated that there is no difference between him and Leander Paes and that he still has a lot to contribute to the Indian Davis Cup challenge

seemed to be in the offing. But then Leander moved on to different pastures and carved out another aspect of his life.

There has never been any public show of disaffection. Even while handling the potentially explosive news of differences between Paes and Bhupathi, Jaideep took pains to defuse the tension. While that storm finally blew over, it perhaps provided the nucleus of another.

Whether this one snowballs or not, the fact remains that the seeds of discontent have been sown. According to some South Club regulars, the news of a change at the top may have been sent out to give the captain a hint of the administration's thinking.

But Jaideep is not taking the hint. He has stated that there is no difference between him and Leander and that he still has a lot to contribute to the Indian Davis Cup challenge, unless advised

otherwise.

What he means is that he will not resign; he will have to be sacked. That also means he will ask Leander directly whether the latter wants a change of leadership. This will naturally be a tightrope walk for the player, because he will come under all sorts of pressure in Calcutta if it were known that he wanted Jaideep out.

On the other hand, Ramesh cannot be faulted for wanting the coveted chair. He has served Indian tennis at least as well as Jaideep and has gone through Davis Cup conditions well enough to be able to help the players out with his advice.

So, the next few months could generate tension and controversy over a person not directly involved in determining the direction of Indian tennis. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta

BIHAR

Alliance in the air

The JMM is keen on striking a deal with the National Democratic Alliance

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) is looking for friends. With parliamentary elections less than two months away, the party which had earlier allied with parties of all possible colours — the Congress, the Janata Dal and subsequently the Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD) — is now trying to find a place in the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

For a regional party like the JMM, siding with the BJP seems to be the most pragmatic move. Twelve of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in south Bihar went to the BJP in the last general elections. The party lost the two seats of Lohardaga and Chaibasa to the Congress. The JMM failed even to retain its Dumka seat, previously held by party supremo Shibu Soren, however, did manage to get a berth in the Rajya Sabha, backed as he was by Laloo Prasad Yadav, president of the state ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal. Although the JMM has so far been a virulent critic of the BJP — as a gesture of solidarity with secularist parties — it now seems politically imperative for the JMM to bury its hatchet given the escalating influence of the BJP and its constituents in Bihar.

Talking to *STANDY*, Soren said that the JMM has decided to maintain equidistance from the Congress and the RJD as both had betrayed the pro Jharkhand masses, ignoring their demand for a separate state. He alleged that both the Congress and the RJD had used the Jharkhand leaders to serve their own interests but preferred to skirt major issues like the formation of Jharkhand. He, however, did not deny the efforts made by the BJP-led coalition government at the Centre to grant separate statehood to the region.

On the question of forging electoral alliance with political parties, Soren admitted that negotiations were on with the leaders of the NDA. He agreed that his party had lost its previous clout among the masses following graft accusations and criminal cases against its leaders and that any attempt to contest the elections independently would be suicidal. Soren believes that the JMM would be able to marginalise anti Jharkhand factions in the region by mustering support from the NDA.

Sources close to the central leadership of the BJP has confirmed that the matter of joining forces with the leaders of the JMM was under consideration. But the pros and the cons would have to be weighed and a consensus reached among the NDA constituents in order to accept the JMM as an alliance partner.

The JMM reportedly has plans of fielding Soren against the Union minister of state for forest and environment, Babulal Marandi, to whom he had earlier lost the Dumka seat. Since Soren lost by a very narrow margin in the last elections, the BJP candidate's chance of a second win are reportedly slim. Only a JMM-NDA tie up can resolve the problem amicably.

But most JMM activists feel betrayed by the BJP stand on the issue of a separate state. The BJP had pledged to grant separate status to the Jharkhand region within six months if it was



LOOKING FOR FRIENDS JMM supremo Shibu Soren

voted to power at the Centre. But since that happened, the BJP has been shedding crocodile tears over the long drawn struggle for a separate state. It is also supposed to have been abetting a countrywide outcry against the proposed Jharkhand state by the proponents of a separate Vidarbha and Uttarakhand, making the prospect of a separate Jharkhand state bleak. JMM activists allege that the BJP's ostensible concern for the Jharkhand demand was just a political gambit to woo the masses.

It is believed that the BJP may agree to include the JMM in the NDA to stem the possible sabotage which the JMM may engineer in league with other anti BJP outfits. Besides, the BJP would have gained an edge over the Congress in the area

as far as the tribal and Christian votebanks are concerned should they form an alliance with the JMM. The tribal Christians, in particular, are not too pleased with the BJP-led Union government's inability to control the 'lunatic fringe' in their self-styled, most infamous crusade against conversion of tribals into Christianity. The support of a party like the JMM under such circumstances, would help in its damage control exercise in this tribal heartland. On the other hand, the JMM would be presumably trying in vain to bolster its image without owing allegiance from a party of sound integrity as the JMM leaders have lost their credibility after facing trials in different courts of the country.

Despite this, the BJP stalwarts still prefer to maintain a distance from the JMM leaders due to the latter's dubious antecedents. And this became evident when Union finance minister Yashwant Sinha refused to endorse a JMM proposal to shift the headquarters of one of any nationalised banks to this region. Sources close to Sinha said that the finance minister turned down the proposal on the ground that it would provide a lever for the JMM to dictate its terms in the day-to-day operations of the bank. •

D.P. Sharan/Ranchi

HUMAN RIGHTS

The missing link

New evidence is unearthed on summary killings in Punjab

After a reign of terror, there comes a reign of despair. This has been the realisation of the Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab (CCDP). The state which went through uninterrupted bloodshed between 1984 and 1994 is yet to come to terms with its trauma. The most disturbing fact is that a large number of people have simply disappeared during the turbulent times.

Even as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is supposed to submit its report to the Supreme Court on the mass cremation of 2,097 bodies in Amritsar district during the period, the CCDP has released its interim report in the last week of July. The report, running over 300 pages, is titled 'Enforced disappearances, arbitrary executions and secret cremations: victim testimony and India's human rights obligations'.

The report reiterates, with a staggering amount of data, the point that human rights groups have been trying to make for a long time: that the pattern of summary killings and disposal of bodies by the state forces engaged in counter-insurgency operations extended far beyond Amritsar, to which the NHRC limited its investigation.

The CCDP's efforts to acquire further evidence of "illegal cremations" resulted in the discovery of records from six districts — Faridkot, Kapurthala, Ludhiana, Mansa, Moga and Ferozpur — which show cremations of 934 bodies, labelled as unidentified and unclaimed, which the Punjab Police had carried out.

There is a background to this exercise undertaken by the CCDP. In January 1995, the human rights wing of the Shiro-



EXTREME MEASURES: *bodies of alleged militants*

mani Akali Dal (SAD) published its findings showing that large number of bodies cremated by the police as unclaimed were of those who had "disappeared" after arrest, on the basis of which a petition was filed in the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

In September that year, one more name was added to the list of the disappeared: that of Jaswant Singh Khaira, general

Meeting of minds

An initiative for cross-cultural exchange in the audio-visual media is launched in Calcutta

You think in visuals. You grew up on a diet of Louis Bunuel, Federico Fellini and Satyajit Ray. You have a story which, you feel, could be turned into a film but do not quite know how to go about it.

Now you can find a producer as well as an entire team of expert audio-visual professionals from Europe who can help you realise your dream project. For the aspiring Indian filmmaker, a whole new world of global opportunities is only a click of a mouse away.

Under the auspices of the European Union, Magica (a Rome-based audio-visual training and research organisation), United Media Associates (entertainment specialists based in the UK) and Millennium Films (a company of television software producers and distributors in Britain) have tied up with the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute in Calcutta to initiate a process of cross-cultural exchange in audio-visual media. At the all-India launch of the programme, called EU-India Media Meeting Point, in Calcutta's British Council, filmmaker Gautam Ghosh sounded highly enthusiastic. Referring to Calcutta's long history of cultural exchange with Europe, he said, "This new initiative in promoting collaboration between directors, writers and producers of Europe and India could revive lost links and even open up new ways of looking at the millennium."

secretary of the SAD human rights wing, who had coordinated research on the cremations

Responding to two petitions filed by the Delhi-based Committee for Information and Initiative on Punjab (CIIP) and Khaira's wife Paramjit Kaur, the Supreme Court ordered an enquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)

The CBI investigations led to the identification of 585 bodies cremated in Amritsar and filing of charges against nine police officers. On 12 December, 1996, the apex court requested the NHRC to investigate the matter further. Although the government pleaded that the NHRC could not take up incidents more than a year old, the court ruled out the objection on 10 September, 1998

However, the NHRC, on 13 January, 1999, issued an order restricting the scope of its enquiry to the 2,097 cremations in Amritsar. For the human rights activists, this was a let down. They wanted the investigations to cover all allegations of mass scale violations in the whole of the state. The CIIP filed a review petition, which was dismissed by the NHRC on 24 March. Now the CIIP is going to move the Supreme Court again.

Meanwhile, the CCDP report has strengthened its claim. The committee has made in-depth analysis of 838 cases. The analysis brings out some disturbing points

- More than 240 persons had been kidnapped from their houses prior to the disappearance

The programme is indeed futuristic in its range, scope, flexibility and open-endedness — something quite unprecedented in India. To start with, there will be two workshops, on screen-writing and coproduction. In the first, Indian writers will be assisted in the process of developing their stories, preferably on cross-cultural themes, by a team of experts from Europe.

The coproduction workshop will be a meeting place of Indian producers wishing to produce/coproduce films/TV films in any of the European Union countries as also of those wishing to coproduce in India with an European partner. These workshops would be primarily focussed on problems related to particular projects. For example, the filmmaker wishing to shoot part of his film in an European country would be given the low-down on coproduction rules in that country including the nitty-gritty of legal

TALKING POINT: filmmaker Gautam Ghosh



- There are eyewitnesses to 530 police abductions

- In 290 cases, persons shown as disappeared or killed in encounters had been last seen in police custody by their relatives

- The relatives of 127 victims have provided information about 390 more cases of abduction, torture and killing

Will the NHRC take cognisance? •

Nilanjan Dutta/Calcutta

A S S A M

Caught in the net

In a major breakthrough, the police nabs ISI agents in Guwahati

Everyone knew about their existence. All of a sudden, they were out in the open. In a major breakthrough, the police in Assam nabbed 31 subversives, including two officers and two agents associated with the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Guwahati. Twenty-seven militants belonging to different Islamic militant organisations were also picked up. No doubt this has come as a blow to the

aspects, visa and work permit. A wide range of information and services would be provided to the participants during the three-month-long workshops, at the end of which they should be in a position to get the cameras rolling.

At the other end of the spectrum are similar workshops involving European filmmakers, producers and screenwriters who would like to produce films under the guidance of Indian professionals. A publicity campaign inviting Europeans in the audio-visual media to participate has been launched at the Cannes and Napoli film festivals, the response to which, say the organisers, has been encouraging.

"The EU-India Media Meeting Point is not a financing body," says Indranil Chakravarty, project co-ordinator, "it should enable people to come together and work together. This is the Indian filmmaker's opportunity to make films on a global scale for a global audience." But would foreign producers be interested in funding a project which is intrinsically Indian, in theme and approach? "To be accepted globally, maybe Indian directors need to do some rethinking," says Chakravarty, hoping that Media Meeting Point will encourage efforts in that direction. "The objective is to connect people," adds Gautam Ghosh. "An organised network of this kind can create that access." "Within Europe there are small pockets of audience for quality films," points out David Evans, the director of British Council. "Getting low-budget filmmakers to reach out to that audience and get their money back so that they can produce the next film," he says, is one of the ideas the programme is set to achieve.

After all, aren't breaking barriers and reaching out to people are what films are all about? •

Chitralekha Das/Calcutta

Up-close and personal

With big-screen idols on the small screen

There have always been filmstars on television. Giving soundbytes to frenzied veejays, slicking back their hair with a practised flick for a crazily spiralling camera, smiling pastily at garish film bashes — we are surrounded by these images in shows which purport to tell you everything you wanted to know about your favourite film person and which end up reflecting empty glitter more than anything else.

Of late, though, there's been an attempt to get up-close and personal with these beings who live out their lives on 70-mm screens, outdoor locations and dubbing studios. And what makes these efforts stand out is the fact that they try and go past the persona and reach the person.

Last week, when Karan Thapar was face-to-face with Kajol in his newly-begun series for the BBC (Wednesdays, 10 pm) we managed to get a glimpse of what this 24-year-old actress, who achieved superstar status in a male-dominated industry in a remarkably short time, is about. Those who are aware of these things knew that



TALKING STAR: Kajol

Kajol hates giving interviews that she has no compunction in turning down high-profile directors if she feels the offer doesn't suit her temperament and her price, or that she can be downright rude in public if she wants to.

In the half hour with Thapar, Kajol chose to smile rather than scowl, and spoke. About how she hates talking about herself (it's so limiting), her marriage and relationship with Ajay Devgan, her childhood and her beliefs, her future plans — quite a coup because Kajol has rarely appeared in print about her private life. This was a TV first.

Aamir Khan may not be as reclusive as Kajol, but he is another filmstar who speaks only to very few people. Simi Garewal snaffled him for a rendezvous last week and got him talk about the women in his life. "I think my co-stars are all very beautiful but I'm madly in love with my wife," said the Khan.

So you wrote Reena (his wife) a letter in blood, stated the hostess. How do you know all this, asked the baffled star. Simi only smiled mysteriously. •

grand plan of the agency which apparently was to convert Assam into a separate Islamic country.

The four arrested ISI operatives were Mohammad Fazih Ullah Hussaini from Hyderabad (in Pakistan's Sindh province), Mohammad Javed Wakhari of Karachi, Maulana Hafiz Mohammad Akram from Jammu and Kashmir and Wari Salim Ahmed from Uttar Pradesh. According to police sources, the names of two appear in the list of the most wanted, prepared by the Government of India.

Giving detail on the arrest, chief minister Prafulla Mahanta said that during interrogation, the arrested persons confessed that they were sent by the ISI to carry out certain operations in Assam and in other parts of the country. The CM also revealed that one portion of the explosives consignment arranged by them was to be handed over to a local contact for use by the ULFA and the rest was meant for the Harkat ul Mujahideen (HUM). One of the major tasks assigned to these people was to trigger off blasts in the Manali-Leh highway to cut off the supply lines of the Indian Army.

Police sources said that late last month, information was received that some ISI men had entered Assam and police in Guwahati was on the look out for them. Three were eventually caught when they tried to exchange US dollars at the ANZ Grindlays bank in the city. Sources said the superintendent of police got the tip off and sent a police team headed by the DSP of Panbazar division, Debendra Deka. The three were caught while the fourth one was picked up from a city hotel.

ISI men initially claimed that they were from Dhr. But their attempt to mislead the police failed. Later, they opened up and their revelations led to the arrest of 27 Islamic militants from different parts of the state. Sixteen of those who were arrested had received training in Pakistan, the police said. The ISI men were well connected and immediately after their arrest, some international organisations alleged that the Indian police was trying to kill two Pakistani nationals.

Meanwhile, the CM remarked that the ISI was trying to use mosques and madrassas to spread its tentacles in the north-east has enraged a section of Muslim leaders. They have demanded a white paper on the issue. A section of Muslim leaders consider this as an attempt by the Assam Gana Parishad and the BJP to terrorise minorities in Assam and have called it a calculated and concerted move with political motives.

The police have come to know that these people had come to Dhaka from Pakistan and had entered Assam by crossing the Kuchitara river through Karimganj. They told the police that each had paid Rs 200 to the BSF personnel through one middleman to enter Assam safely.

Police sources said that one of the nabbed men had taken a number of youths to Pakistan in batches for training through the Assam-Bangladesh route. During interrogation, it came to light that people taken from India by the HUM were first taken to Karachi and were given training in handling arms and explosives in the Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir.

Meanwhile, the United People's Party of Assam (UPPA), a constituent of the ruling alliance in the state, has condemned the reckless statements made by the chief minister and an army official involving the Muslims and their institutions. The UPPA president and state irrigation minister Abdul Muhib Majumdar has said that the statement has 'vitiated' the atmosphere in Assam and caused tension and misunderstanding among the different sections of people. •

Dileep Chandra/Guwahati



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 22 AUGUST, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

It is essential to keep abreast of the latest information and developments in your particular field of endeavour or interest. There is a danger that you will act on outdated facts and figures and make errors. It can prove impossible to gain the upper hand in business negotiations.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

People who are in a position to extend goodwill, active support or financial backing will be more than ready to do so. You can gain allies in powerful places. Business conferences can be useful for introducing oneself to influential people. Their cheerful state should make access to them easier.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Something you have been hoping would happen is now likely to come true. Carefully laid plans can now come to fruition. Friends will respond to calls for help and support. You may now realize the quality of friendship you have cultivated for years. Close acquaintances can prove their true mettle.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

Try using all available means including advertising and publicity stunts, to increase profits. Hidden forces are working in your favour and will assist your efforts. Seemingly chance encounters may further your own interest. Keep an eye on extravagant impulses.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

You may have a difficult week to contend with. There may be important decisions to make, but confused thinking can mean that you make the wrong choices too often. Take things at a slower pace. Give yourself plenty of time to contemplate all aspects of problems that have to be dealt with.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

Your spouses' relatives are likely to put their point of view forward in no uncertain terms. They may try to cramp your style by planting the trump cards they are holding. Top bosses are likely to nitpick and be in a bad temper. Don't allow fears and anxieties to grow out of all proportions.



VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

Come directly to the point without too much show of formality. Influential people will be in a cooperative mood. It will be easier to obtain favours from them now. Advertising schemes can produce profitable results. Conduct high level meetings under secrecy.



SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

There is not much chance of getting any sense out of romantic partners even though there are serious issues to discuss. You probably need the company of congenial friends. By the end of the week you may find that you were worrying about nothing at all.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

Patience is probably the key to getting things right. Long distance business arrangements can lead to misunderstanding. More impartiality is required if the true facts are to emerge. Listen more carefully to what others have to say. Nightmares should not be taken too seriously. Pamper yourself.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

Unfortunately you cannot put too much trust in the actions and decisions of business associates or colleagues. They will just not approach important matters with the same thoroughness as you would yourself. It is not your week to delegate jobs or meetings that you can possibly handle yourself.

AQUARIUS

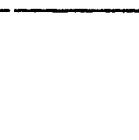
(21 January-20 February)

It may be in your best interest to get to work a little earlier to make sure you do not miss any valuable opportunities that crop up during the week. New and well-paid jobs and openings may be on offer, so try and be at the head of the line. Friends may be spreading rumours behind your back.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

You may have to grope in the dark when faced with new and unprecedented situations. You will have little choice but to proceed by trial and error. Even your intuition may let you down, but the experience you gain can prove invaluable in the future.



Letter wars

■ Did the President of India, K.R. Narayanan, write two letters to the Prime Minister on the telecom crisis?

Apparently, he did. However, the second letter was not delivered to the PMO. What happened was this: some journalists procured a draft of the letter and cal-



K.R. Narayanan: presidential writ?

led the PMO to ask if it had been delivered. No, it hasn't, said the alarmed PMO officials and assumed that was that.

But more was to come. Next day at least one newspaper wrote that Rashtrapati Bhavan was sending a second strongly worded letter to the Prime Minister, implying that relations between the PMO and Rashtrapati Bhavan had broken down altogether.

While the PMO denied the existence of any such letter, no denial came from Rashtrapati Bhavan. This led bureaucrats to conclude that there was a letter which simply wasn't sent.

So, somebody leaked the draft to cause a hitch in the PMO-driven New Telecom Policy. Who could it be? The PMO is trying to find out, only through sources called Vimal.

HEARD AT SOUTH BLOCK

**The state of Indo-Pak relations?
We've even made a movie on it:
'Kutch Kutch Hota Hai'.**

A BUREAUCRAT IN THE MINISTRY OF
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AFTER INDIA SHOT
DOWN A PAK PLANE IN GUJARAT

Dropping the idea

■ Was there ever a Kargil tax? Yes there was. It was finance minister Yashwant Sinha's idea. Now there isn't: Sinha killed it himself. And there might be one in the future: depending on revenue buoyancy.

Sinha did discuss the matter with his bureaucrats and directed them to find out if it was necessary. Even as they were discussing it, the minister bounced the idea off on the people of India in various public interactions, meetings, etc. A little taken



Yashwant Sinha: taken
aback

aback at the hostile response, he decided to call it off.

It had nothing to do with anyone else.

Sahara Canada?

■ Why is Sahara India so interested in the history and politics of Canada?

Rumour has it that owner Subrata Roy's son has managed to get citizenship of Canada. Roy himself is said



Subrata Roy: business
interests

to be acquiring business assets in that country.

Nothing wrong in that, except that with non-banking finance companies folding up like so many packs of cards, Roy is expected to be a shareholder and not an active participant in taking care of his own.

And obviously this is a matter between Roy, the Reserve Bank and the

CHECK-LIST

Gold: what exactly is happening to it?

■ **The story so far:** Prices dropped to a 20-year low worldwide after the Bank of England announced it would sell 415 tonnes of gold. The first tranche of 25 tonnes was offloaded on 6 July, leading to a crash in prices. Today, gold in India is about Rs 4,020 per ten gms.

■ **However:** The differential between the international price and the cost at which it is sold in India still makes the smuggling of gold lucrative.

■ **So that has led to:** The Indian market offering an attractive retail price, though smuggled gold is cheaper today than ever before. Hence, there is no demand in the white market. But the grey market, that's another matter altogether.

■ **And now:** Gold, which was struck off the list of hawala dealers, is back on it. Especially as NRIs can bring gold, but only after paying a duty of Rs 400 per ten gms. As this used to be Rs 220 per ten gms in 1992, it is much more lucrative to smuggle gold than to bring it through the legit route.

ELECTION DIARY

Number 9

■ The Shiv Sena-BJP combine government believes that number '9' is their lucky mascot. After all, the lucky numeric combination — which added to 9 — in seat-sharing brought the alliance to power in Maha-

HEARD IN THE BJP OFFICE

We've managed a victory in Kargil, it's M.S. Gill we're worried about now.

A PARTY WORKER



Pramod Mahajan: will the superstition pay off?

rashtra after the 1995 Assembly polls

The Sena had then contested in 171 seats and the BJP for remaining 117 Assembly seats (1+7+1 and 1+1+7 = 9). This time too, the coalition partners have decided to stick to this seat-sharing combination.

But they have carried their number '9' obsession still further. The combine kick-started their election campaign on 9 August, with a public rally at Chowpatty. In fact, Union information and broadcasting minister Pramod Mahajan who's also the chief architect of the alliance informed at the rally that he had to refuse Raj Thackeray's request for an extra Assembly seat to Sena for the number '9' reason.

Incidentally, an unwell Sena chief and star campaigner Bal Thackeray arose to address the rally at 9 pm.

The Sena had gone a step further in this new-found obsession. The party's publicity cassette 'Shiv Sena Public Demand' designed by Raj is of '27' minutes duration. It consists, you guessed right, nine songs. Well, it remains to be seen whether number '9' will rescue the alliance once again.

Of father and son

■ K. Karunakaran has won the battle. He got his son Muralidharan a Congress nomination for the Lok Sabha, and got himself shift-

ed to a 'safer' seat.

Apparently, initially, he told Congress president Sonia Gandhi that he wanted to contest the Assembly elections and that his seat should be given to his son.

Then via some complicated routes, too devious to be described here, not only did Murali get the seat, despite having lost two Lok Sabha elections, but Karunakaran secured a Lok Sabha seat for himself as well.

There's politics for you.

The boss

■ L.K. Advani has at last come into his own. Now there is some life and activity in the BJP central office. Advani has a room in the party office (he's been given the room that K.R. Malkani used to occupy once). He is accessible to cadres. He is strategising the campaign with the party.



L.K. Advani: making his presence felt

And there is almost no doubt now who the next party president is going to be.

This is a complete contrast from Kushabhau Thakre who is now becoming the elder statesman in the party, happy to take a secondary position. Thakre's supporters say the comparison is unfair. But the fact is that L.K. Advani is the Party Boss again. •

CHECK-LIST

States in the south: who stands where in the Lok Sabha tally

■ **Tamil Nadu:** The state where elections will be most difficult to read. The reason: the traditional two-way division of votes will be split at least four ways. The Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) has a sizeable vote-bank and is currently trying to harness the Dalit votes (see story) in the states. The BJP is another unpredictable factor. Hard to say what will happen here.

■ **Andhra Pradesh:** The chief minister, Chandrababu Naidu believes that while he will sweep the Assembly elections, the Lok Sabha elections may go to the Congress. He may be mistaken about the former.

■ **Kerala:** Not much of a fight here, really, because the Left and the Congress are actually allies at the national level. Some expect sparks to fly in those constituencies where the BJP has a presence.

■ **Karnataka:** Here it is the Lok Shakti and J.N. Patel-led combination which is fighting the BJP, with the Congress opposing both. An unpredictable elections (though predicted as a cakewalk for the Congress only a few months ago).

Hold that pose

■ Guess who photographed Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee for portraits

Fashion photographer, Rohit Chawla.

The photo-session last week which went for more than an hour had the Prime Minister taking a deep interest in Chawla's work. He



A.B. Vajpayee: fascinated by photography

wanted to know exactly which equipment was used for what, especially the light-meter. Vajpayee seemed to be fascinated by the whole business of photography which is all about the control of light.

Chawla, who is known to imbue his subjects with glamour, is now on test. And by the Prime Minister of India.

Never in writing

■ Former minister for telecommunications, Jagmohan hasn't been an IAS officer for nothing.

When he was summoned to Rashtrapati Bhavan and asked for his views on the

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

**Sonia Gandhi is the contender;
Manmohan Singh is the
pretender.**

A CONGRESSMAN EXPLAINING HOW POWER
IS DIVIDED BETWEEN THE CONGRESS
PRESIDENT AND THE FORMER FINANCE
MINISTER



Jagmohan: avoiding controversy

CHECK-LIST

Congress and Panchmarhi: forgotten promises

■ **One:** The Congress will not give tickets to criminals and economic offenders. There are several in the party who have been given tickets despite being charged with economic offences or crime. But the catch is: so long as they are not convicted, only charged, they are innocent.

■ **Two:** The Congress will not nominate anyone who has lost a Lok Sabha elections twice. There are at least three persons in the Congress who have lost elections twice, including K. Muralidharan and Kerala chief minister K. Karunakaran. But who cares?

■ **Three:** The Congress will not form a coalition government. A deal has already been struck with Jayalalitha. Is it the party's case that once it forms the government, the ADMK will not be in the government?

telecom imbroglio, he went willingly enough and explained the whole thing to the President of India. But when he was asked to supply a note on the controversy, he declined on the grounds of propriety.

Isn't that the official motto of the Indian *bahu*? Never give anything in writing.

Lucky George

■ Defence minister George Fernandes should consider himself lucky. The general elections intervened. Otherwise, he was on his way to being turfed out of the government.

Apparently, President K.R. Narayanan (who has only praise for the defence minister) believes that though Fernandes has done a fine job of defending India, there is another man, who might be even better at it: for-



K.R. Narayanan: all praise for K.C. Pant

mer defence minister K.C. Pant, whose talents are remarkably under-utilised.

This Raisina Hill view of the government has been noted by the PM and locked away in memory to be used in future. •

Farak zero aur...



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KARGIL: FAILURE IN THE MIND

SUNDAY

16 Q

A.B. VAJPAYEE



CHANDRABABU NAIIDU



LALOO PRASAD YADAV



SONIA GANDHI



JAYALALITHA



SHARAD PAWAR



uestions

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to know about the 1999
elections but didn't know whom to ask**

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THE CULTURE PROFILE Prized possession

All his films have won national awards, but *Asukh* is the closest to Rituparno Ghosh's heart.....56

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V. Gangadhar

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Everything you always wanted to know about the 1999 elections, but didn't know whom to ask

POLITICS 12

Mutual convenience

The TDP-BJP seat sharing will benefit both Chandrababu Naidu and Atal Behari Vajpayee



ENVIRONMENT 52

Poison potion

Assam's Karbi Anglong district is hit by crippling fluoride contamination





Locking horns

The cover story *Souring ties* (15—21 August) made an interesting reading. It has been rightly pointed out that PMO and Rashtrapati Bhavan are at loggerheads now. President K.R. Narayan has openly come out in accusing the government over the telecom policy. And even the President's speech on the eve of Independence Day this year, was laced with criticism. The Presi-

dent's comment that the military would have to be strengthened and equipped with the latest weapon is being seen as vindication of what the Opposition has been clamouring for following the Kargil crisis.

President's comment in the wake of the Kargil conflict also smacks of distrust for the Vajpayee government. At a time when the country is passing through a tremendous political uncertainty, the rift between the PMO and the Rashtrapati Bhavan wouldn't augur well for the country.

Pradip Khanna, New Delhi

■ After the Kargil crisis, President K.R. Narayan has stressed the need for being pragmatic in our dealings with Pakistan. Although he extolled Prime Minister Vajpayee's bus diplomacy, he has rightly pointed out the BJP government's lapse over the intelligence failure. He has rightly quoted Mahat-

ma Gandhi to justify the fact that it has been India's onerous responsibility to forge a bond with its neighbour often at the risk of Pakistan stabbing from behind.

Sapna Biswas, Siliguri (West Bengal)

Striking a middle course

Though India has the satisfaction of humiliating Pakistan, America may not dump Pakistan for the sake of India (*After Kargil*, 1—7 August). To solve the Kashmir issue, India needs to steer clear of the extremists' expectations and strike a middle path for peaceful relations with its neighbouring country.

R. Ramasami, Tiruvannamalai, (Tamil Nadu)

Unflinching support

Indian Army chief Gen. V.P. Malik's interview brings out a vital aspect in the defence of any country (*"The Kargil campaign is a good tonic for the country and the army"* 18—24 July).

In any game between two competitors, any amount of prior practice can not establish one's superiority over the other unless tested in a match. Similarly, any degree of military preparedness of a country can not just be taken for granted to be sufficient enough to be able to contain a belligerent neighbour posing constant confrontation and threat without an actual engagement between the two.

Of course, however unfortunate and sad the resultant human and material losses may be, these are to be accepted as a part of the game. What is of paramount importance is the unflinching support to the soldiers with utmost respect for their

supreme sacrifice from all the other countrymen.

Amarnath Kamat, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Uphill task

I sincerely hope Sachin Tendulkar this time will hit the jackpot in his second stint as captain (*Sachin: scene-stealer*, 1—8 August). Although his job isn't easy, he has the intelligence and the right spirit to take the Indian cricket team



Sachin Tendulkar: great expectations

out of the doldrums. And Sachin is mature enough now to handle the pressure of captaincy and would play his normal game for the team.

Samir M. Mahajan, New Delhi

■ Although Sachin Tendulkar is a great batsman, his batting talent was affected earlier due to the pressure of captaincy. Ajay Jadeja, on the other hand, has a fine temperament who is cool and confident. I feel Jadeja would have been ideal.

Bhupen Bose, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Know your facts

This refers to the story *Beyond Kargil* (25—31 July). The writer has mentioned that no air force in the world had carried out operations at heights above

K.R. Narayanan (left) and A.B. Vajpayee: face-off



16,000 ft. And no aircraft has been designed for terrain like Kargil. But, sadly both the statements do great injustice to the pilots, crew and technicians of the Indian Air Force who during its infancy nurtured the force with courage, dedication, innovative skill, loyalty and faith.

During the 1947-1948 conflict, on 26 January, 1948, Micky Blake and I carried out an offensive sortie to Skardu at 25,000 feet. We (8th Pursuit) were based at Jammu. We didn't have maps that would help us fly directly from Jammu to Skardu. So, we flew across the Pir Panjal ranges crossing it at a point named by us 'Pope's Nose' to reach Srinagar.

This account is not meant to diminish the skill and bravery with which the Indian Air Force has performed the duties against heavy odds at Kargil. I admire them and salute them.

Livy Mathur, New Delhi

Not far from Calcutta

I am very much delighted in reading your story *A place called Kolkata* (8—14 August). It is so relevant when our megacity is renamed after 'Kolkata' by replacing its former identity. The 'outsiders' like your correspondents have delicately observed the spot, not far from the madding crowd of Calcutta, with thrilling experience. And it is rightly compared and contrasted with that of the city of Calcutta.

Sudip Kumar Chakraborty, Howrah (West Bengal)

Right lesson

The disenfranchisement of Bal Thackeray (8—14 August) is a belated but fitting lesson to those who think that they are above law. He



Bal Thackeray: taming of the Tiger

has been evading law for a long time and was even spurring the judiciary on several occasions.

A time has come to tell these self-appointed dictators that the hands of law are long enough to reach them. He and his men made themselves objects of ridicule when they cried for the blood of the thespian Dileep Kumar. If only we Indians are respected, it is mainly because of our genuine secularism. The punishment given to Bal Thackeray is too mild. He should have been stripped of the right to vote for another 25 years. His followers should ask him to retire from dirty politics and close his mouth.

U.S. Iyer, Bangalore (Karnataka)

India-bashing

This refers to the cover story on *Benazir Bhutto* (1—7 August). It is indeed hard to trust Pakistani leadership right from Jinnah to Mrs Bhutto. All Pakistani leaders appear to be visionaries and statesmen when not in power. Mrs Bhutto has inherited these traits from her late father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Once in power Pakistani leadership becomes myopic and plays in to the hands of powerful and vested elements in the form of dreaded ISI, armed forces, militants and bureaucracy whose sole survival is in hate-India campaign. When Benazir Bhutto was in power she was equally an India-hater.

Rajni Bhatia, Noida (UP)

Hardly tenable

This refers to the story *Shame* (1—7 August). Congress spokesman Kapil Sibal claimed that the Kargil war was a great victory for the *jawan* and a great failure for the BJP government. From this one concludes that army's victory implies government's failure and army's failure would imply government's victory.

But, if one looks at the Indian history, Kapil Sibal's statement would prove to be false. Clearly, it would be difficult for the Congress to counter the Vajpayee wave in the wake of the Kargil crisis. Hence Sibal's desperation to confuse the electorate.

Mahendra Chandra Das, Bhubaneswar (Orissa)

Shrewd move

In the column headlined *Diplomatic coup* (8—14 August) the columnist has very aptly weighed the pros and cons of our post-Kargil diplomatic victory and has rightly advised our policy makers to exercise more caution and adopt a more balanced view of the situation.

Pakistan carried out its Kargil misadventure merely to internationalise the Kashmir issue. India is undoubtedly up against heavy odds to keep third party mediation at bay. Pakistan's High Commissioner to India Mr A.J. Qazi's recent statement mooted a proposal for a meeting with Indian leaders at the UN General Assembly is a shrewd move to take undue advantage of India's vulnerable situation wherein political leaders are much too pre-occupied with their election campaigns to give their undivided attention to pressing issues like diplomacy.

Nalini Sudhakaran, Trivandrum (Kerala)

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

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Meen Moon Sen
Actress



Minu Bhattacharya
Actress

Contributed by Sarada Sanyal, Srerampur (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

DIED: Niraj Nath Dasgupta, 90, eminent bio-physicist, in Calcutta, on 15 August. He was founder-chairman of the biophysics division of the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, and had built the first electron microscope in India.

DISCOVERED: a unique water management system dating back to the 6th century BC, in the drought-stricken Kalahandi district of Orissa.

LAUNCHED: the Pratichi Trust, by Prof Amartya Sen, in



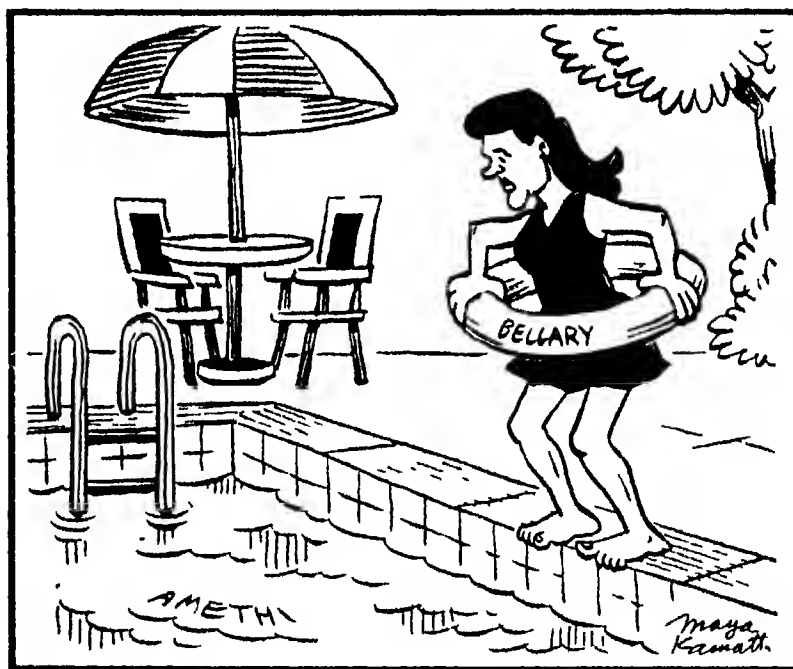
Calcutta, on 19 August. Set up with his Nobel Prize money, the trust will focus on research in areas such as primary education, public health, poverty and gender inequality.

KILLED: Dally Mungro, general secretary of the NSCN(K), by rival insurgents, near Kohima, on 18 August.

BARRIED: by the Election Commission, the screening of any documentary on the Kargil conflict till voting for the Lok Sabha polls is completed.

RESIGNED: R.S.S.L.N. Bhaskarudu, managing director of Maruti Udyog Limited, on 16 August, four-and-a-half months before the end of his tenure.

SIGHT & SOUND



M. KARMATH THE ASANA

■ We do not think it is in the national security interest of these two countries to develop a nuclear weapon capability, to develop an elaborate doctrine and then encourage an arms race by both India and Pakistan

JAMES RUBIN *US state department spokesman reacting to the Indian draft nuclear doctrine*

■ The Congress has emerged as the secular spearhead in today's context. Support to the Congress, either from inside or outside, is a historical necessity at the moment

JAIPAL REDDY *former I&B minister after quitting the Janata Dal and joining the Congress*



■ Both my children are extremely interested in politics... But they are not interested, at the moment, to be in active politics.

SONIA GANDHI *AICC president*

■ Industry does not have the money to fund the second election in 13 months. The contribution by the corporates for these elections will be less than 50 per cent of last year

RAHUL BAJAJ *CII president*

■ Aircraft accidents are cause for concern. They indicate inadequate involvement of flying supervisors and breach of orders and instructions

A Y TIPNIS, *Air Chief Marshal*

■ I've been linked to everyone from an airline owner to a political heavyweight. Ugh, I'm not a man-eater. I'm quite happy being a vegetarian

SONALI BENDRI *film star*

Pakistani intrusions achieved total surprise as they were never anticipated

With the election campaign revving up, detractors of the war and critics of the government have put a sinister spin on the Kargil war. Based on complaints of the erstwhile commander of the Kargil brigade, Brig Surinder Singh, they have conceptualised a theory that the intelligence failure was part of criminal negligence to prevent the strategic catastrophe which cost so many young lives.

The frontal attack on the establishment suggests that the government and the army were forewarned but deliberately refused to act. Congress party spokesperson Kapil Sibal, in cahoots with the disgruntled brigadier, is the chief architect of this bizarre accusation. Sibal and Singh have done a Bhagwat on the government. This time around, no distinction has been drawn between the army and the government. In fact, the charge is now against Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General V P. Malik, the recipient of Singh's letters and briefings, who is alleged to have ignored his field commander's warnings.

The fact is that the Indian Army failed to anticipate this type of an operation: intrusions staggered over a wide front

Three weeks ago, Sibal took the lid off the Singh sleaze by quoting just the letter number of a confidential letter (No 124/GSD/V1s) dated 25 August, 1998, to the COAS which was a routine record of the COAS' visit on 21 June, 1998. He failed to keep his promise to reveal the details of intelligence warnings, probably cautioned by the Official Secrets Act and the rebuttal from the COAS that no letter of that description was addressed to him.

A few weeks after the Kargil surprise, people made slanderous charges accus-

Kargil: Failure Of The Mind



ing the government of ordering the army to leave gaps on the LoC and reduce the frequency of patrolling. For soldiers, this was treason. A Bombay-based correspondent for the *US Businessweek* asked this writer to confirm these stories.

It is unthinkable that the army could ignore the warnings of the Kargil commander. Creative journalists, lacking the understanding of military procedures and operational responsibility, have embellished the Singh story and enhanced his threat perception. On his part, Singh has admitted in writing on 28 June, 1999, in his first and only letter to the COAS, that he had "no inputs" to even conceive of "intrusions" that took place.

Singh was removed from command not just for failure to detect intrusions, but for inept handling of subsequent operations to restore the situation. Whether singling him out was the right decision at the time is a moot point. What is not in doubt and acknowledged by the army is that others in the hierarchy are also culpable and being investigated. Singh is not the fall guy.

The objectionable portion of the Singh episode is the penchant of journalists to make him the hero of Kargil and not what he turned out to be: the origin of the rot.

The larger question of intelligence failure must examine both intention and capabilities. Pakistan certainly has not, for some time now, had the capability to wage conventional war against India. Therefore, Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) buttressed by nuclear deterrence has become its preferred option.

The Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) is tasked to provide a 15-day warning for a war situation. In the prevailing LIC scenario, alarm bells that the Taliban surplus would transfer from Kabul to Kashmir, have been ringing periodically and army commanders acknowledged these warnings saying they were ready for them. So, some strategic intelligence input had been forthcoming. What higher intelligence could not indicate is the time and place for the incursions, the tactical dimension of a forewarning.

After the Taliban had seized 90 per cent of Afghanistan in 1997, this writer had indicated that Taliban movement into Kashmir would follow the short cut from Badakshan to Chitral and on to Gilgit-Skardu.

For gauging adversary intention,

existing political relations have to be factored. The country was misguided by intelligence intention inputs, first in 1959 when without a whisper the Chinese built the Aksai Chin road, and later in 1962, the army was given the tall order of evicting the Chinese from Thag La. This time, the Lahore process could have created a false sense of Hindi-Pakistani Bhai Bhai.

In 1965, intelligence failed to inform the government that Pakistan was down to two days of reserve ammunition, or

The fact is that the Indian Army simply failed to anticipate this type of an operation: intrusions staggered over a wide front. This was the unexpected among all its contingency planning. Capture by Pakistan of a single or a couple of posts on the LoC, yes. But intrusions across the LoC on this size and scale were, as Singh has admitted, never expected and therefore not catered for.

The Pakistan plan did not work due to an overkill of masks, disguises and denials. An undercover operation has its limi-



Gen. Parvez Musharraf (seen here with Nawaz Sharif): only four others knew of the undercover operation

that Pakistan had raised a second armoured division, both critical, strategic inputs. The Yom Kippur war completely surprised Israel. It altered the strategic equation on the battlefield, though, as in Kargil, the Israeli defence forces both retrieved and reversed the situation. Nevertheless, Egyptian intelligence scored a complete strategic surprise by a brilliant cross-canal tactical manoeuvre.

Last year, India conducted its nuclear tests during the CIA. Indian scientists dodged the panoply of sophisticated US surveillance devices including humint which is still the core of any intelligence apparatus. Indian intelligence stumped CIA at Pokhran. R&AW tapping the conversation between COAS Gen. Parvez Musharraf and his CGS, Lt-Gen. Mohammad Aziz Khan, in the now famous China Tapes, was an intelligence coup.

So why did the intelligence arm of the government fail to forewarn the army of the Kargil invasion? This was Pakistan's Yom Kippur to break the stalemate over Kashmir. The ingenuity of this clandestine operation and its sheer tactical perfection have to be acknowledged and the Pakistani devil given full credit.

tations converting into an overt one. It went undetected in its preparation and launch as secrecy was its hallmark. The success of the operation hinged on one single factor: surprise. This contingency plan had probably been collecting dust in the Pak DGMO's closet for years.

It was pulled out by the commando-bred and trained Parvez Musharraf and shared with just four others: Aziz Khan, GOC 10 Corps, Lt-Gen. Mohammad Ahmad, DGMO Lt-Gen. Tauliq Zia and GOC FCNA, Maj. Gen. Javed Hassan. Others came in at the time of the launch.

Extraordinary precautions had already been taken during the launch. No troops were brought in from outside, so no unusual movements. About 1,000 soldiers from the Northern Light Infantry already deployed there were used. Redeployment and preparations were carried out at night. Even the local Baltis were taken unawares. The forces and logistics were assembled and inducted in deafening silence. Incredible secrecy and deception made detection difficult and surprise complete.

The Kargil deployment has not changed since 1972. The FCNA has been



Gen. V.P. Malik (seen here with A.B. Vajpayee and George Fernandes): he is alleged to have ignored his field commander's warnings

observing the large and tempting gaps across the LoC in Kargil for 27 years. An intrusion across the Kargil front was never anticipated by man or beast. Even large-scale infiltration was discounted, though some did take place through Dras in 1993.

The enhanced threat perception of 500 Afghans training in Gunkot, referred to by Singh in his briefings, was not to the LoC but in his rear areas, 50 km away in the Padam valley and the road. In the war games and discussions he had with the army high command, (COAS, VCOAS and DCOAS) there was no hint by him of encroachments. When asked by his army commander who spent three days with him to identify the weak points in his defences, Singh said: "I have none." His request for additional troops was not for the LoC but for Padam valley and the road.

The intelligence lapse was therefore in the collective mind of the army. It failed to see the Gunkot woods for the Padam trees. So far, so bad. But what about routine tactical operations to monitor the unheld gaps? This is where the battalions of the Kargil brigade, its commander Singh and the Leh divisional commander failed to carry out ground and air surveillance of the area

The patrol programme is the most beguiling operational responsibility of fighting units in war and peace. Surveillance is carried out at least on paper over every inch of territory as domination, link, civic action, long range, com-

posite and inter-formation patrols. In addition, air surveillance operations are carried out over difficult terrain in helicopters. This was done casually. It was not as if helicopters were not given as claimed by Singh. He wanted one to be positioned next to him.

The Kargil brigade erred grievously on surveillance. Singh's plea that he did not get permission to send out patrols is



Surinder Singh's plea that he did not get permission to send out patrols is ill-founded — a commander needs no permission to police his area

ill-founded. A commander needs no permission to police his area. Equally flimsy is the excuse that snow boots and other equipment were not available.

A report is circulating in the media that Pakistan was scouting European markets for 50,000 snow boots. No one has asked why Pakistan would need boots to equip three high-altitude divisions. Chandru Mahatane, a German NRI, well-versed in the European shoe business, has said that had he been tipped off about Pakistan's shoe-shopping spree, he would have tracked them down and might have saved the day at Kargil.

Singh had asked for satellite imagery, RPVs and the moon, as commanders everywhere are prone to, knowing full well these assets are non-existent. The truth is: Singh has 'not said' what has been widely attributed to him. He has been used by journalists and the Congress party to sensationalise and distort the intelligence and operational lapses in Kargil. Politicising the army is bad enough, exaggerating and trivialising its deficiencies in the afterglow of victory is merely mean.

The immediate upshot of the Pakistani misadventure is the reorganisation and upgradation of the Kargil brigade, part of the Leh division into a new Corps with its headquarters at Leh. The clear lesson from Kargil is that the intelligence arms of the armed forces and the country have to be restructured and modernised along with the sword arm.

The internal and external reach of military intelligence has to be enhanced so that the army can detect the blip of aggression among the clutter of infiltration. There is the need for a defence intelligence agency like the ISI in Pakistan as part of a national intelligence grid. At present, military intelligence receives a princely Rs 5 crore against Rs 500 crore for R&AW and dollars 50 billion for the CIA.

For weeks without success, intelligence was scouring for Pak 19 Infantry Division, its GHQ reserve for the hill areas, to determine whether it had been moved opposite Kargil. Unfortunately, R&AW, with inadequate infrastructure and resources, is not geared for a war-like situation.

Kargil was an intelligence and operational lapse. Singh's letters and afterthoughts were no forewarning. He was part of the collective failure of the mind. Indian psyche and intelligence, both need to be upgraded. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

The pint-sized challenge

But Sushma Swaraj has both guts and ambition

It is amazing how naive even the most intelligent and shrewd politicians can be, sometimes. L.K. Advani had just completed his second *rath yatra*. Sushma Swaraj had gone to Calcutta with him. Advani got a tumultuous response. Looking at the crowd from a distance, Swaraj is said to have commented that she had never been so happy. "The crowd is here because it is curious. It wants to see me," she remarked.

This artless remark was reported back to the RSS headquarters and picked up by *Panchajanya*, the *Pravda* of the BJP. Writer and RSS worker Devendra Swaroop announced that he had conveyed Swaraj's remark to 'those who would convey it to the people it needs to be conveyed to'. BJP activists understood immediately what he meant: he had told Govindacharya who had been asked to carry it back to L.K. Advani.

Later, when it was clarified that she had been misquoted, Advani forgot the whole matter. But to those watching Swaraj, it revealed a new facet of her personality: the ambitious Ms Swaraj.

At the first meeting, it is hard not to like her. Sushma Swaraj is personable, friendly and affectionate. You wonder a little about the rope-like *mangalsutra*, the liberal use of *sindur*, in short, the laboured attempts to achieve the *Bharatiya naari* image.

But what the hell, everyone has the right to dress as one likes.

Then you look a little harder. It isn't just the clothes, it is the personality. Swaraj is trying to tell you something and she wants you to believe her. She's saying, without actually spelling it out, I'm efficient, I'm modern yet traditional, I'm a professional.

Then you begin to talk to her circle. She has a lot of supporters, you find, but it is hard to find out who her friends are. What is the difference? Only that supporters have a sort of a commercial relationship with a politician while friends will support them through thick and thin — and sick and sin.

However, there was a whole lot of people who used to swear by Swaraj, counting her as a friend, who now bitterly denounced her. So you begin to

**Swaraj is trying to tell
you something and she
wants you to believe her.
She's saying, without
actually spelling it out:
I'm efficient, I'm modern
yet traditional, I'm a
professional**

try and find out why.

The problem seems to be that Swaraj is seen as a politician who lets you believe that you're her friend; but only so long as you are useful to her. Once again, this is a new facet: Ms Swaraj is a politician and an ambitious one.

Consider Swaraj's rise in power politics. Krishan Lal Sharma had a lot to do with bringing her into the BJP. However, Sharma fell out so badly with her that the two don't really talk these days. Swaraj's protege L.K. Advani sensed that she was drifting away after Atal Behari Vajpayee made her a minister. For Swaraj Vajpayee was a means to an end. After the Delhi fiasco and Madan Lal Khurana's sabotage, you couldn't help feeling sorry for Swaraj. She had painted herself into a corner and no one was even offering to help her out.

But the fall from grace was arrested when she got a chance to contest from Bellary against Sonia Gandhi. Once again Sushma Swaraj has offered herself as the lamb for slaughter, even if she loses Bellary, the sentiment in the BJP will be such that she will be able to enter Parliament via the Rajya Sabha, who knows, maybe from Karnataka.

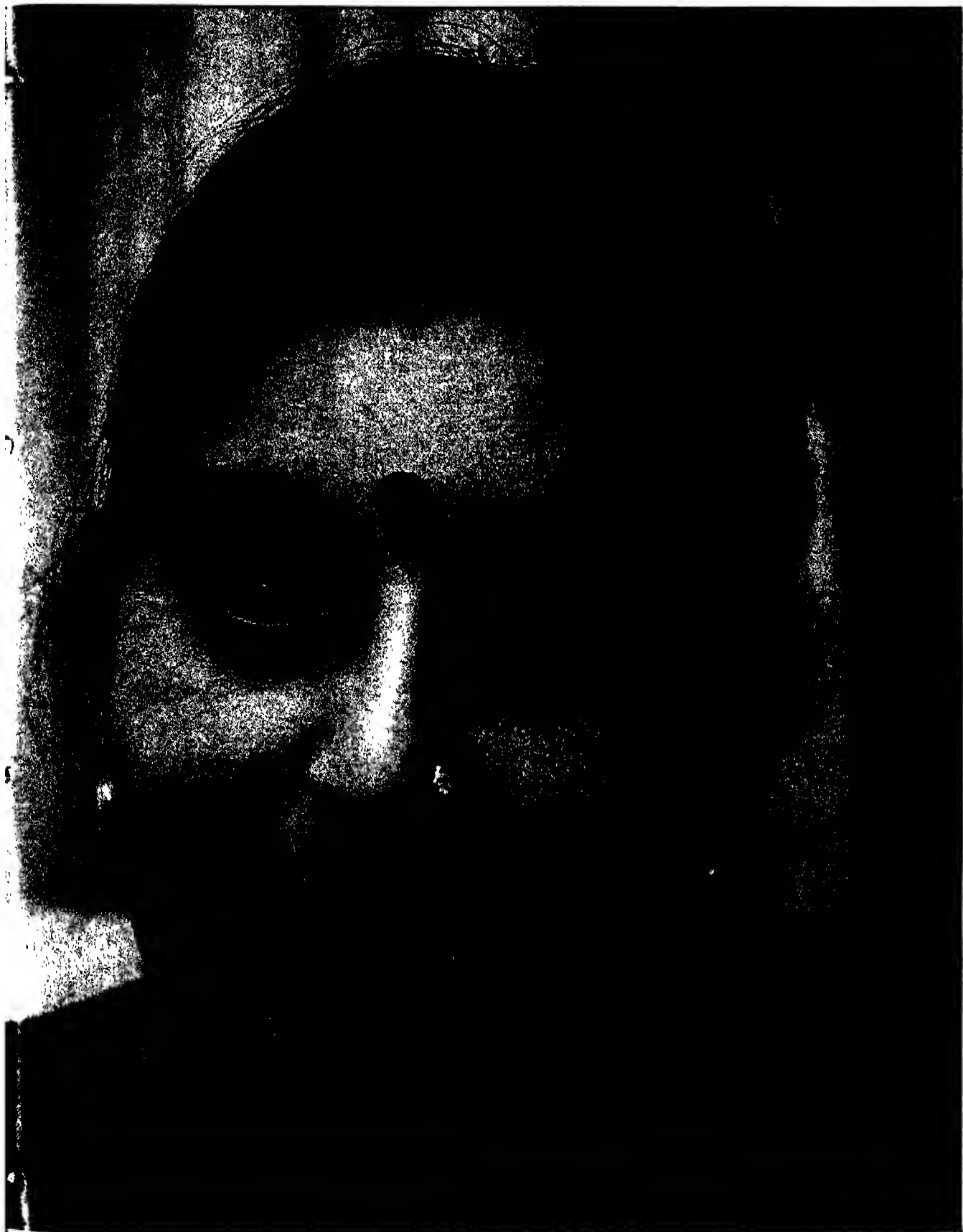
How her name was chosen for the Bellary seat is a story in itself. No one knew about it except L.K. Advani and Atal Behari Vajpayee, the latter not too favourably disposed to her any longer.

So when Advani went to Vajpayee to suggest that Sushma be fielded against Sonia in Amethi, Vajpayee's reaction was lukewarm. Why not let the candidate continue, he suggested, indicating Sanjay Singh.

But, he said, keep an eye on Sonia Gandhi. When the idea was mooted to Kushabhau Thakre, his response was that Swaraj was hell-bent on staying out of the election and that he could not force her to contest.

Of course when Sonia Gandhi filed her nomination from Bellary, Swaraj was there, ready to give her all for India and the party. And be known all over the world as the lady who challenged Rome.

Again the bottom line is clear. Swaraj is intelligent, shrewd and sincere. But again in a way that defies comprehension, naive, probably because ambition gets in the way. •



Mutual convenience

The TDP-BJP seat sharing will benefit both Chandrababu Naidu and Atal Behari Vajpayee

It's anything but a marriage made in heaven. Pundit Venkaiah Naidu brought the bride and groom, kicking and screaming, to the altar. The Telugu Desam Party finally agreed to an electoral tie-up with the Bharatiya Janata Party in Andhra Pradesh. The latter had asked for 20 Lok Sabha and 60 Assembly seats, but driving a hard bargain for the dowry, Chandrababu Naidu ultimately agreed to let go of only eight Lok Sabha and 25 Assembly seats.

TDP spokesman Umareddy Venkateswaralu took pains to make it clear that

this was *not* an alliance but a "seat adjustment" and the party would *not* join the National Democratic Alliance.

More embarrassing was the manner in which Naidu made the BJP state unit run around in circles before finally condescending to say yes. BJP president Kushabhau Thakre had come to Hyderabad in July promising a final announcement within a week. And Naidu's response: "We will only say that we want to see Vajpayee as Prime Minister."

Then the state BJP set a deadline: 19 July. Naidu kept mum as the deadline came and went. Incensed, the BJP state



unit began releasing figures of the number of applications received for Assembly constituencies. Silence still from Naidu.

The BJP released its own list of candidates for all the 42 Lok Sabha and 100 of the 294 Assembly seats. Naidu opened





Chandrababu Naidu: fearing the 18 per cent

local leaders.

Finally, after long telecons with Vajpayee and Advani, the chief minister picked up the phone and called the BJP state unit president, Ch Vidyasagar Rao. In a couple of days the official announcement was made.

Still, both parties are facing a dilemma: a tie-up could just as easily hurt them, as help them. No one is sure which.

As Vidyasagar Rao puts it, "We polled 18 per cent of the votes in the 1998 LS polls and won four seats. After Operation Vijay (Kargil), we are confident of increasing that percentage and doing very well in the Assembly elections on our own." This assessment is backed by the RSS. The local BJP also fears that the anti-incumbency factor against Naidu may mar their chances.

Naidu's argument is that the BJP's performance in the last Lok Sabha has no bearing on the Assembly elections. Here, the choice will remain between the Congress and the TDP.

And it is the Assembly polls that

Naidu is most worried about. In last year's Lok Sabha polls, NTR's fiefdom, coastal Andhra, rejected Naidu overwhelmingly (he won only one of the 13 seats). The Muslims, too, have been alienated following Naidu's support to the BJP government in Delhi.

This compulsion had thrown up another alternative: have seat adjustments for the Lok Sabha but fight the Assembly polls separately. The idea was finally dumped as being too complicated.

On the other hand, both could stand to gain from each other. In 1998, when they fought the elections separately, the BJP and the TDP polled 50 per cent of the votes. Together they could be a more potent force.

Naidu and Vajpayee have other more pressing concerns. Naidu fears that the BJP may be emerging as a strong third force in the state. Perhaps the best way to check this is to align with the party.

Vajpayee, on the other hand, wants the TDP firmly by his side in case of another hung Parliament. Having fought the elections together, Naidu will hardly be in a position to act coy later. •

Sarita Rani/Hyderabad

up a little, only to say, "I will announce my decision at an appropriate time."

The state BJP leaders were hysterical and in a unanimous resolution asked the central leadership to allow them to fight the elections on their own. Naidu called up Vajpayee and asked him to rein in his

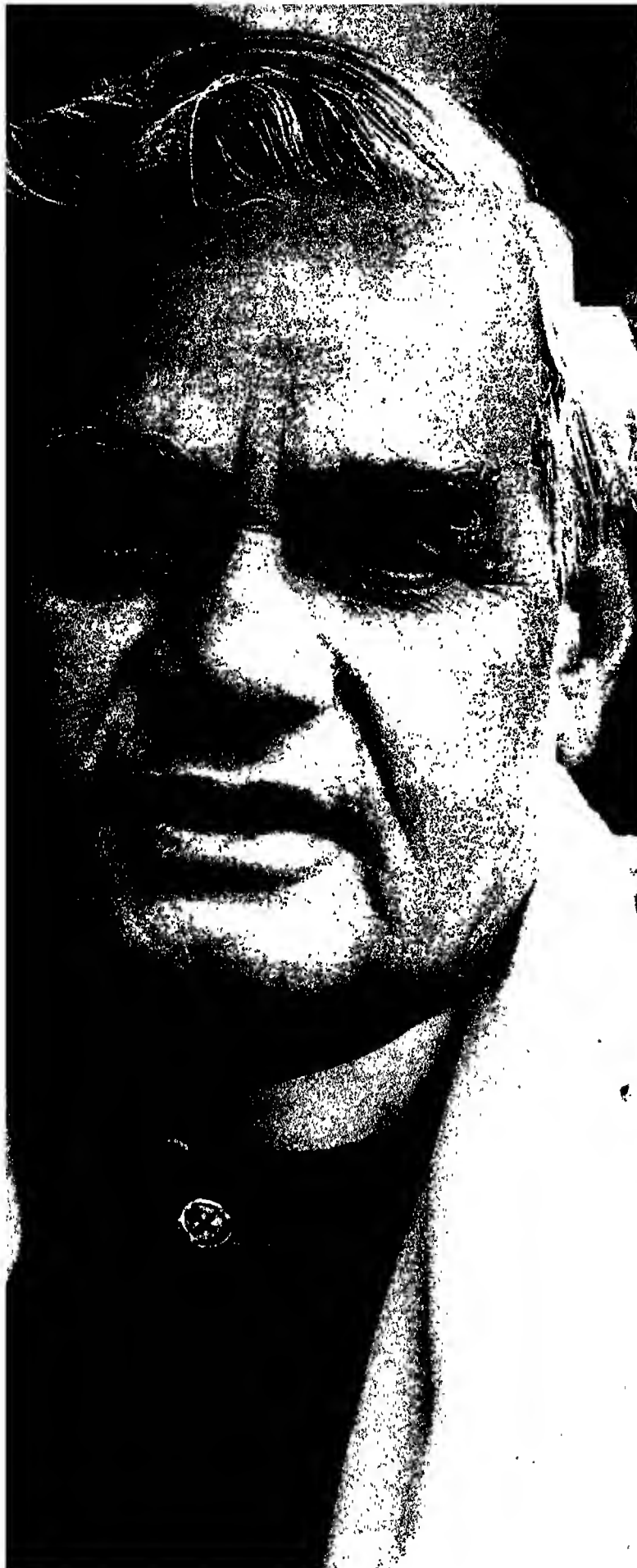
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Knowing Is Everything





6 Que

Everything you
always wanted to
know about the 1999
elections but didn't
know whom to ask

Whether it is cocktail parties or the chaupal in the village, the discussion about the forthcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections is centred around some issues.

SUNDAY's team of correspondents in the state capitals fanned out and tried to identify these issues. Posed as a set of questions, we present a distilled version of all the queries that are being raised in India about the theory and practice of politics—in the last elections in this millennium.

The Campaign

1) In whose favour will the Kargil war go?

It is hard to say. One argument is that it is always the BJP which benefits from a nationalist wave because it has a cadre which can capitalise on issues like this.

But then, it is also true that the way the government has handled post-war propaganda, especially charges of intelligence failure, has lost the BJP a lot of credibility.

Linked to this is the other issue. Nationalism and jingoism are largely urban phenomena. So, initially, there was some doubt about whether the Kargil euphoria would penetrate into villages.

But the way contributions have poured into the various war relief funds set up by NGOs and

stion

governments would suggest that Kargil is an issue in the rural hinterland as well. So, the next question is: will the war won by India translate as a war won by the BJP?

And if it does, will people forget basic issues like lack of water, food and jobs and vote for the BJP on the basis of Kargil?

This seems unlikely. People are asking themselves how Indians came to lose their own territory and whether Indian soldiers were sent to their death by irresponsible (BJP) politicians.

On balance, Kargil will work for the BJP as an election issue if it is canned and sold as patriotism. For the Congress, Kargil will have to be represented as the army's victory and the BJP's somnolence.

But at best, Kargil can serve as background music to the unfolding main scene. If the candidate of a political party hasn't performed, he should not look to Kargil to save him.

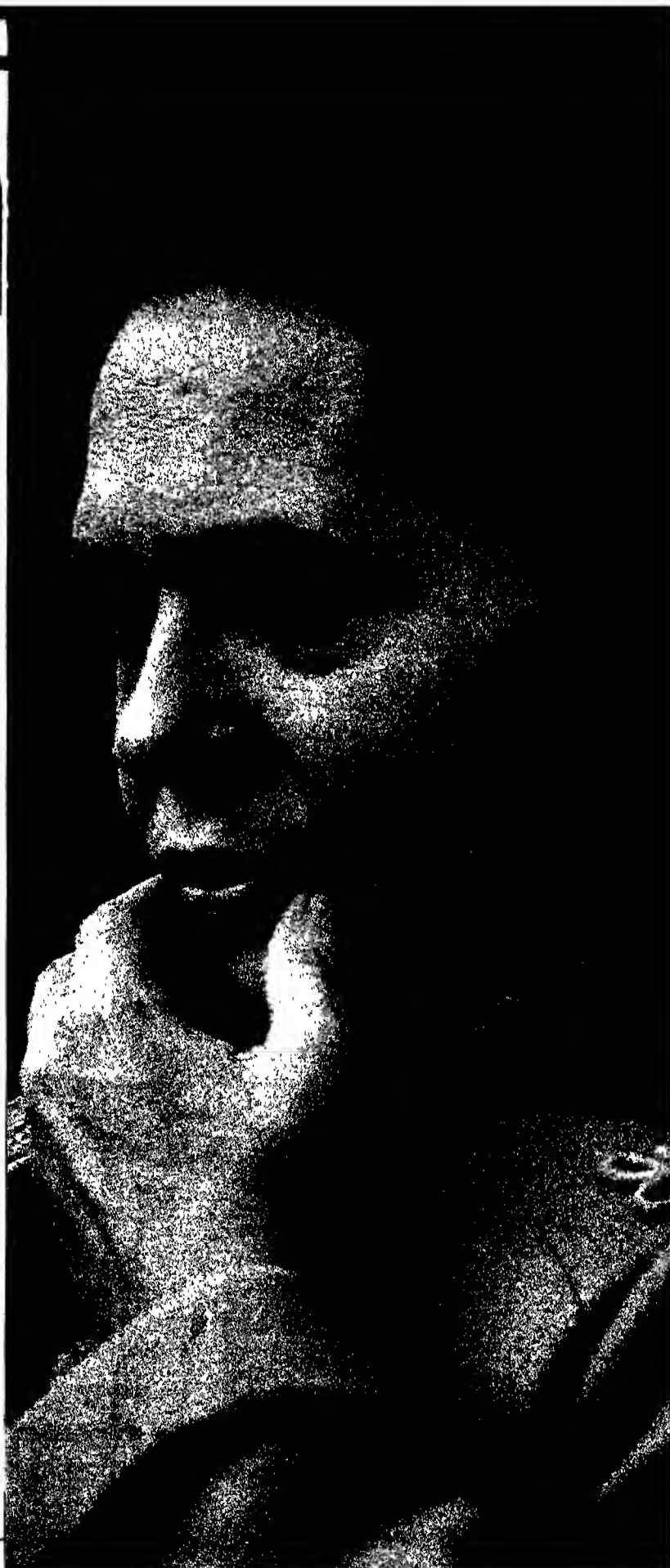
2) Does the issue of a foreign-born Prime Minister of India really have any meaning as a campaign issue?

In villages in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, for instance, it makes little difference to people whether the Prime Minister is Indian or foreign-born. For, in either situation, the Prime Minister is a remote and distant entity.

In urban areas, among traditional Congress or BJP voters, the divide is along party lines and loyalties. Those who have always voted Congress will argue that Sonia Gandhi is as Indian as anyone else. Those who have always voted BJP will say: Thank God our party has a through-and-through Indian as its leader.

What is clear is that the issue of a foreign-born Prime Minister will have a tremendous impact on party workers. Indeed, an RSS worker argued that the BJP's performance has been lacklustre at best. But if the Congress is allowed to have its way, Indians won't be able to raise their heads in the world out of shame. So this is the only motivation for the RSS to work in this election.

This may well be the case. In towns and cities, RSS workers will strive to defeat Sonia Gandhi, not out of affection for Atal Behari Vajpayee, but because of her Italian origins. In the same way, Congress workers realise that they have to prove a point and that this is the last chance to preserve the secular fabric of India.



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Now that the BJP and its allies have announced that they will work towards legislation to make it mandatory for a person holding high office in India to be a natural-born Indian, this is all the more reason for Congressmen to defeat this intention. For, if someone born and grown up in the United States wants to return to India and work here, should he/she be deprived of the chance of becoming Prime Minister?

3) Should Sonia Gandhi declare that she will be Prime Minister if the Congress comes to power?

There are two options which the Congress is reportedly considering. One is to declare Sonia Gandhi as the only candidate for the presidency of the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) when it meets after the election: this would automatically mean that Sonia Gandhi will be the Congress's prime ministerial choice.

The other option is to say that Sonia is not a power-grabber, and that she will continue to be president of the party regardless of whether the Congress comes to power or not, but will not be PM. This is a way of getting rid of the foreign-origins tag. Sonia Gandhi can then anoint someone — say Dr Manmohan Singh — as an alternative choice for prime ministership.

Politically, it is hard to say which is better. While it is true that by abdicating her claim on

Kargil will work for the BJP as an election issue if it is canned and sold as patriotism. For the Congress, Kargil will have to be represented as the army's victory and the BJP's somnolence

prime ministership, Sonia will scotch any debate on her foreign origins, it is also true that the Congress has never, in its history, been able to have two poles of power. When the Prime Minister and the Congress president have been two separate persons, there have always been problems.

Electorally, it may be better to clear the air. But then, if Sonia Gandhi doesn't want to be PM, why is she contesting the election?

4) Can the secular Opposition unite?

This is the key to the emergence of a credible alternative to the BJP.

In the past, the Opposition has been most successful when it has been united in its anti-Congressism. In other words, the Opposition — secular or communal — has been reactive rather than pro-active, in a frame of reference decided by the Congress.

When the Congress supported the Janata Dal to form two successive governments, it was suggested that the days of anti-Congressism were over. The communist parties did their best to whip up support for the proposition that communalism was a greater danger than the Congress. But possibly because they were not convinced of this themselves, this idea could not gain ground.

Therefore, valuable time has been lost and slowly the BJP has moderated its position, moved in and occupied the space vacated by the secu-

lar Opposition. So, once again, the anti-Congress Opposition (the bulk of it, anyway) has united, with the lead being given by the BJP.

But the secular Opposition—the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and even the Left—continues to be anti-Congress. It is hard to see how they will change their position. And until they do, there can never be true unity in the secular Opposition.

The Alliances

5) How sound is the United Janata Dal-BJP alliance?

At the moment (that is, before and during the elections), rock solid. Despite the BJP Karnataka unit's anger at having to work with what were, till recently, its enemies, the alliance has managed to iron out several of the wrinkles.

The BJP would have preferred to test the alliance in the Lok Sabha elections, rather than the Assembly elections. But there is no choice.

However, there are many in the BJP who argue that the party was given no choice. The tension between supporters of L.K. Advani in the BJP and those of Atal Behari Vajpayee in the NDA continues and the Janata Dal(U)'s induction into the NDA is just another manifestation of this tension. So, while Advani joined his party's clamour for more power to the BJP in the coalition, Atal Behari Vajpayee made a public statement indicating that the entry of the Janata Dal(U) would help the BJP.

The electoral effect of JD(U)'s joining NDA will merely be that some Assembly seats will be lost, a fact reiterated bitterly by the BJP. But then the BJP was never in a position to form the government in Karnataka any way.

What will happen after the elections, however, is that Vajpayee will find himself strengthened by the former socialists, against his own party. Therefore, the emphasis on the Hindu agenda and the tussle for power within the BJP will heighten. This has serious repercussions for the BJP government's stability.

6) Are the Congress's allies as enduring as it imagines?

It is lucky for the Congress that even its own candidates don't think it is coming to power at the Centre. Otherwise, with unpredictable allies, like Laloo Yadav and Jayalalitha, it would have found itself under a great deal of pressure.

Consider the Congress allies' recent behaviour. Laloo Yadav upset everyone in the Congress by announcing that he was giving a 14th seat to the Congress, only because of 'Madam's' insistence. Jayalalitha promised to come for Sonia Gandhi's first election meeting in Tamil Nadu but didn't turn up. Mrs Gandhi retaliated



Lal Krishna Advani's hold over the BJP, especially after October when he is likely to take over the presidency from Kushabhau Thakre, will tighten

by saying that coalitions don't work any way. So the beginning is not propitious.

The allies are watching to see how Sonia Gandhi will behave. They're not sure if she will be the real boss in the Congress or someone else.

Others, like Sharad Pawar, are waiting to see what happens after the general elections. If Sonia Gandhi abdicates responsibility, or if the Congress splits again, Pawar and others will force a realignment of forces. Allies like Jayalalitha are, in that event, unlikely to be mere passive supporters. They might even try and force a realignment in the Congress from the outside.

It is hard to say now what will happen after the election. The Congress's eyes are not fixed on this general election but the next one. And that's when alliances forged now will be crucial.

7) Can the BSP and the Congress have an adjustment of seats?

In Uttar Pradesh at least, this would have been just what the doctor ordered. But it doesn't seem likely.

In eastern UP there are at least 15 seats which have a sizeable population of Dalits. An arrangement with the BSP would have meant the BSP's victory in some constituencies and the Congress's assured victory in some others. At this moment, both are cutting into each other's votes and, therefore, the BJP can slip through easily.

But the Congress cannot be blamed for this. The BSP is at best an undependable ally and at worst a predatory one. This is because it knows it



is placed in a strong position. It has a voter base which is transferable. So it would like to know from the Congress what there is in it for the BSP, if the votes it has are transferred to the Congress.

Under the circumstances, any alliance can only be a fragile one. The Congress has chosen to reject it.

8) Where will the TMC vote go?

Not to the Congress, that's for sure. The Tamil Maanila Congress, certain that the Congress has lost its acceptability in Tamil Nadu, is expecting to corner the Congress votes. This is clearly indicated by its promise to bring back Kamraj rule in Tamil Nadu by the turn of the century.

What exactly does this mean? That like the Congress led by Kamraj, the TMC will ally neither with the DMK nor ADMK but will work to become the third independent alternative in Tamil Nadu.

The TMC had begun by dismantling the Congress's Dalit vote bank, now reorganised as the Puthiya Tamizhagam. It will also target the Muslims who were supporters of the DMK and are apprehensive of the DMK's bear hug of BJP.

The TMC is hoping to claim the Congress vote and make itself a viable partner for the Congress to do a deal with. At this moment, worried

Laloo Yadav upset everyone in the Congress by announcing that he was giving a 14th seat to the Congress only because of 'Madam's' insistence. Jayalalitha promised to come for Sonia Gandhi's first election meeting in Tamil Nadu but didn't turn up





TMC leaders are joining the Congress, rather than expend the time and effort in setting up a new political organisation.

The Personalities

9) What will happen to Sonia if the Congress doesn't improve its tally?

Sonia Gandhi is only now, in television interviews and media briefings, giving the people of India a glimpse of what she's really like. Will she, if she's defeated, pack her bags and run away to Italy to help her sister run her antique shop? No, that's not the stuff she's made of.

Is she devious enough to keep the Congress together even in defeat? It is hard to say. There is no doubt that this election is crucial to her political development. And yet, this is not a decisive election—in that it will not seal her political fate.

There are many who say the Congress will split after the elections and the rump will go with Sharad Pawar who will be egging Congressmen to leave the company of a losing leader. Congressmen are never graceful in defeat. Look what they did to P.V. Narasimha Rao and Sitaram Kesri when the two leaders took a few wrong turns along the road.

Sharad Pawar has been in the Opposition for a long time—in Parliament, in the state, and in his party. He needs a victory. So, he's going to try hard as hell to engineer one

The difference between them and Sonia Gandhi is that she belongs to The Family. So, while factionalism in the Congress and name calling will probably increase once it becomes clear that the Congress is not forming the government—and it seems it isn't—after the usual calls for accountability, the dust will settle.

Of course, if the Congress improves its current tally, the credit will be given to Sonia Gandhi, as it was in the last round of Assembly elections. Then she has to decide whether she wants to continue being president of the party or she would rather groom her children for the job.

10) Sharad Pawar prided himself on being a state leader. But after this election, will he remain even that?

As things stand now, Sharad Pawar has been a stunning success at state politics when he's been in the Congress and a spectacular failure when he's been out of the Congress.

So why should this trend be any different this time? According to this calculation, the Congress should perform well in this election because the BJP-Shiv Sena suffers from the incumbency handicap. That Assembly and Lok



Demolition of the Babri Masjid: the lunatic fringe of the BJP is not going to keep quiet forever

Sabha elections are being held together merely underlines and enhances the disaster that the state government has proved to be.

So this should mean that Sharad Pawar will smash the BJP-Shiv Sena citadel, will make significant inroads into the Congress strongholds and emerge victorious — shouldn't it?

But several things are wrong with this picture. One, what will the effect of holding Assembly and Lok Sabha elections together be? The last time this happened was more than 30 years ago. Will the Lok Sabha election act as a force multiplier for Pawar in the Assembly elections? Maybe. But the fact is that if the government in Delhi lasts its full term of five years, the pattern of state and Lok Sabha elections may well become the norm in Maharashtra.

But psephological trivia aside, the Maharashtra elections — both — hold the key to Sha-

There is no doubt that this election is crucial to Sonia Gandhi's political development. And yet, this is not a decisive election — in that it will not seal her political fate

rad Pawar's political fortunes. The Congress isn't overly worried about it. It figures that it has to sit in the Opposition anyway.

But Pawar has been in the Opposition for a long time — in Parliament, in the state, and in his party. He needs a victory. So, he's going to try hard as hell to engineer one.

In Maharashtra, the Dalits are an important force. In fact, the Congress Index of Opposition Unity (IOU) was so high leading to a Lok Sabha victory only because Pawar had succeeded in uniting all the factions of the Dalit parties in favour of the Congress.

Today, he has no one but the Ramdas Athawale group. This is a significant gain in itself because Athawale is the Dalit leader with greater following — Prakash Ambedkar is less important. But the issue is that there is no unity among the Dalits, the source of mass votes.

Pawar has also burnt his boats by more or less indicating he would support the BJP-led NDA, should the opportunity arise, leading to the complete alienation of the minorities. Thus, the minorities, which were willing to forgive Pawar for his role in the Bombay riots, are now vengeful and doubly certain they will vote for the Congress — to defeat the BJP and its ilk.

Pawar's dream was to be master of 50 seats in the new Lok Sabha, so that he would be able to control the choice of the new PM. At this moment, it doesn't look as if his dream will materialise.

11) Will L.K. Advani tighten or loosen his grip over the BJP?

Oh, tighten it definitely. Even though the campaign has just begun, Advani has already decided who the faces representing the party will be. The significant thing about this election is: there are very, very few new faces. This is not like the past elections when people we'd never heard of had become BJP candidates: ranging from Chetan Chauhan the cricketer, to Nitish Bharadwaj the Krishanji in the television serial.

One reason is the sitting-getting principle that the BJP has scrupulously adhered to. The other is the pressure on seats from the allies which severely curtails the BJP's manoeuvrability.

But the third reason is that L.K. Advani has played a major role in deciding who will contest from where. This election is not a foray into the new unknown. It is not a voyage of self-discovery. It is an election of consolidation for the BJP.

Therefore, Advani's hold over the party, especially after October when he is likely to take over the presidency from Kushabhau Thakre, will tighten. He has allowed the NDA to become a counterpoise to the BJP, much against his better judgement and the interests of the party. But now it is time to consolidate the party. And this election will help him do it.



Mayawati and Kanshi Ram: Invoking Ambedkar will be a right reserved by these two

12) Will Vajpayee indicate who his successor will be?

Which Prime Minister in India has ever indicated his successor?

There is little reason for Vajpayee to do so. Because if he does, the power struggle between the younger elements in the party — Sushma Swaraj and Pramod Mahajan — to name two — will break out and probably take him in its wake.

The Forces

13) Will Hindutva make a comeback?

Without a doubt. The lunatic fringe of the BJP kept quiet when the BJP explained that it was part of a coalition and therefore could not do anything about the Ram Mandir. It kept quiet when the issue of Article 370 was swept aside because it was not on the National Agenda for Governance. It even allowed the government to pull it up on the issue of Christian missionaries.

But it is not going to keep quiet forever. When the religious leaders denounce Atal Behari Vajpayee for what he has become — a leader of the National Front, not the BJP — the chickens will come home to roost. And expect this to happen sooner than later.

14) Is social justice a factor at all in this election?

On the face of it, no. But examine the electoral lists of all parties and you can see all of them pay-

The JD(U)'s induction into the NDA is another manifestation of the tension between the Vajpayee and Advani camps. While Advani demanded more power to the BJP in the coalition, Vajpayee indicated that the entry of the JD(U) would help the BJP

ing their homage to Mandal. In UP, this issue has reached boiling point and is going to explode very soon.

15) Has secularism become irrelevant?

Theoretically, no. But in practice, yes.

Secularism was defined in terms of the degree of saffron that the Well Dressed Man in the BJP was wearing.

But the saffron element in the BJP has faded. In the last 18 months they've been in power. In India, secularism has been defined for historical reasons according to the definition understood by the Muslims. Now it is the Christian minorities which are feeling persecuted.

Secularists are feeling a little cheated. Not only has the Janata Dal split and gone over to the BJP, but also the BJP is not doing the things they were certain it would do. Like reclaiming Kashi and Mathura.

But this is the same set of people who ensured the Babri Masjid fell and rejoiced when it did. So while the theory of secularism never gets dated in India, the practice of it has become a little rusty. But by no means is it irrelevant.

16) Have the Dalits polarised into an anti-BJP, anti-Congress mass?

Not yet, but they're getting there. Unless the NDA and the BJP announce a political programme for the Dalits, and unless the Congress tries to get them into the fold, they will go to the BSP. And then, invoking Ambedkar will be a right reserved by Mayawati and Kanshi Ram. •

The Good Doctor

A day in Manmohan Singh's life stretches across two worlds

It is 6.30 am and the formidable iron gates to Dr Manmohan Singh's Safdarjung Road residence are ajar. You push them in and peer gingerly inside expecting a) guard dogs to attack, b) SPG bullets to riddle you, c) stentorian shouts asking you where you're going.

Nothing.

There is a guardhouse by the door, and some men in khaki who're sitting around and having an *adda*, smile vaguely at you. Warmed at this display of camaraderie you beam back. There's a flowering hibiscus bush nearby. Why not present them a hibiscus flower each which they can stick into the gun barrels, considering its all peace and love around here? Maybe we can even hold hands and sing 'we shall overcome'. Or maybe, they'd like 'Imagine'.

But such radical thoughts have to be abandoned, for there's work on hand. The office of the Congress(I) candidate from South Delhi, former finance minister of India and possible Prime Minister, is open.

Dr Singh is already up and about. ("I wake up at 5") having briskly taken charge of his day. That's what he thinks. Soon, he will be helpless putty in his campaign managers' hands, protesting piteously as the remainder of his day is ruthlessly chopped and changed by those who know better. The recurrent theme of the day is: '*Bechara kitna sharteef aadmi hai*.'

His workers are having an argument. He had a car, allotted to him by the government as a member of the Rajya Sabha, which he returned the day Parliament was dissolved. He's now campaigning in a hired car, a DLY, with a sir-

en slapped on by his workers, overruling Singh's protests. The AICC has given him a top-open Gypsy. But only five or six people can stand beside him in the Gypsy. So the argument is who should accompany him as he drives for his campaign.

There have been many such arguments. Although a Congress worker confesses that all factions in the Congress have sunk their differences to ensure Singh's victory, "he made it clear to us that he was a retired man who had no money to spend".

Singh's admirers are conducting his campaigning, literally counting pennies. Each MLA from his parliamentary constituency is working on the assumption that this time he has to fight not one but two elections. Singh has no money at all, and much to the despair of workers, is actually returning money to people who're collecting it for him. "I ask you, madam," says a worker, "how can anyone not vote for such a decent man? Just the other day someone came up at a public meeting and handed Dr Singh a purse of Rs 51,000. Doctor Sa'ab returned it to him, saying: 'you keep this and spend it here for campaign expenses'. We've never seen anything like this."

On the campaign trail, Singh lists his pet hates. Security and protection arrangements which have become the index of politicians' importance; the glitz of elections, the cars, the sirens, the loudspeakers; and unpunctuality.

So he arrives at his first meeting venue promptly at 8.00. His host, the local MLA, is still at home, and has to be summoned on a mobile. Singh waits patiently and chats with others. Bananas

are passed around as breakfast. Other savvier candidates would arrange breakfast packets for workers to ingratiate them. Singh's workers are there because nothing else matters, except that Singh should win from South Delhi.

This is a matter of prestige for the Congress. Despite winning four out of six Assembly seats in the last election, the Lok Sabha seat has been held by the BJP for the last four Lok Sabha terms. That Vijay Kumar Malhotra has won just once from here in 1977, is some small consolation.

By the time the MLA arrives, Singh is





Manmohan Singh: believes the Indian system survives on patronage

chafing at the bit. The abashed MLA is told off by the workers. Doctor Sahney Zee TV ke interview mein kaha tha ki woh kabhi 'ate nahin hote ham Aapne woh programme nahin dekha'. For most of them, Dr Singh is a new commodity but one they have no problem in marketing. For Singh, too, it is all very new. As the day progresses, he's not sure if he likes fighting Lok Sabha elections.

But once the campaign starts, there is no doubt that people like what they see. Although it is relatively early on a Sunday morning, people come out of their

According to Manmohan Singh, the BJP has made a major mistake in tying India's economic fortunes to its political ones. "The economy is now hinged on friendly relations with the United States. If something were to go wrong..." he says grimly

nouses and balconies in various stages of undress to smile and wave at Manmohan Singh. How does India convey respect? By a *namaste*—a bow and a smile. In this area, you can see people respond.

In the 1st Lok Sabha election, the Congress was trounced in this Assembly segment by a margin of more than 90,000 votes. People would take the Congress manifesto, look at it and let it drop to the ground. You could tell by the way they wouldn't meet our eye that they were not going to vote for us. But just look at this," says one of Singh's managers, waving his arm at the people



Manmohan Singh with Congress workers: can he win the Lok Sabha polls?

on both sides of the road

Singh himself is flushed, a little happy, a little embarrassed, also a little proud of the way he's handling it all. He says he's continually amazed at the generosity of the Indian voter, at his modest expectations and his victimisation by the system. "Everyone should have access to basic housing, basic hygiene, basic schooling and when I walk through some of the slums where I see people living in filthy conditions on the edge of subsistence, I wonder how long they will have to live like this." He quotes Marx. Philosophers have tried to interpret the world. The point is to change it. It's like being back in college

Singh has finished his round of meetings. He's prostrated before the Guru Granth Sahib in Gurudwaras, bowed low before deities in Hindu temples (both Arya Samaji and Sanatan Dharmi), has attended mass in the Mar Gregorio Orthodox Church, has addressed a

meeting in the Valmiki Mandir and is now ready to go home. He has an interview. But not just yet. Congress workers are practical. A *pradhan* of a local slum has been arrested. The FIR says he's been arrested for 'election work'. Manmohan has to tell the slum that their *pradhan* will be returned to them even if they have to fight to the end.

His car swerve and takes a fork. The others shout 'Where are you taking him?' He has a BBC interview.

'*Oh chhadu ji*,' says the local leader contemptuously. "BBC mein 6000 vote hain."

Now Manmohan Singh is peeved, tired and irritated. But this has to be done: its part of the game. He speaks to the slum dwellers. Now, he can return. But there is another engagement. A birthday party of yet another worker's grandson. They shove a *laddoo* in Singh's mouth. He winces — he's a diabetic and is not allowed sweets. A worker obser-

ves laconically "Kuchh paane ke liye kuchh khana parta hai."

But Singh has lost none of his dignity. He's running late. The BBC interview is cancelled. The car speeds back home. He talks about power and the Indian system: how it survives on patronage. But Rajiv Gandhi tried to change it and took where it got him? He pauses and says it has got to be done. "Our delivery systems are faulty," he says. "If power is decentralised and people know they are in control of their destiny, it will be easier to set it right."

He got a chance during the Narasimha Rao government. But Manmohan Singh is candid. After the fall of the Babri Masjid and the Bombay riots, Narasimha Rao was concerned only with the survival of his government. So only those economic reforms could be pushed which were okayed by the Cabinet. Parliamentary action had to be put off.

Singh confesses that he offered his resignation to Narasimha Rao three times, owning constructive responsibility for failure: once when he had to roll back subsidies on fertilisers, once during the securities scam and then when the Joint Parliamentary Committee submitted its report. But Rao did not accept his resignation.

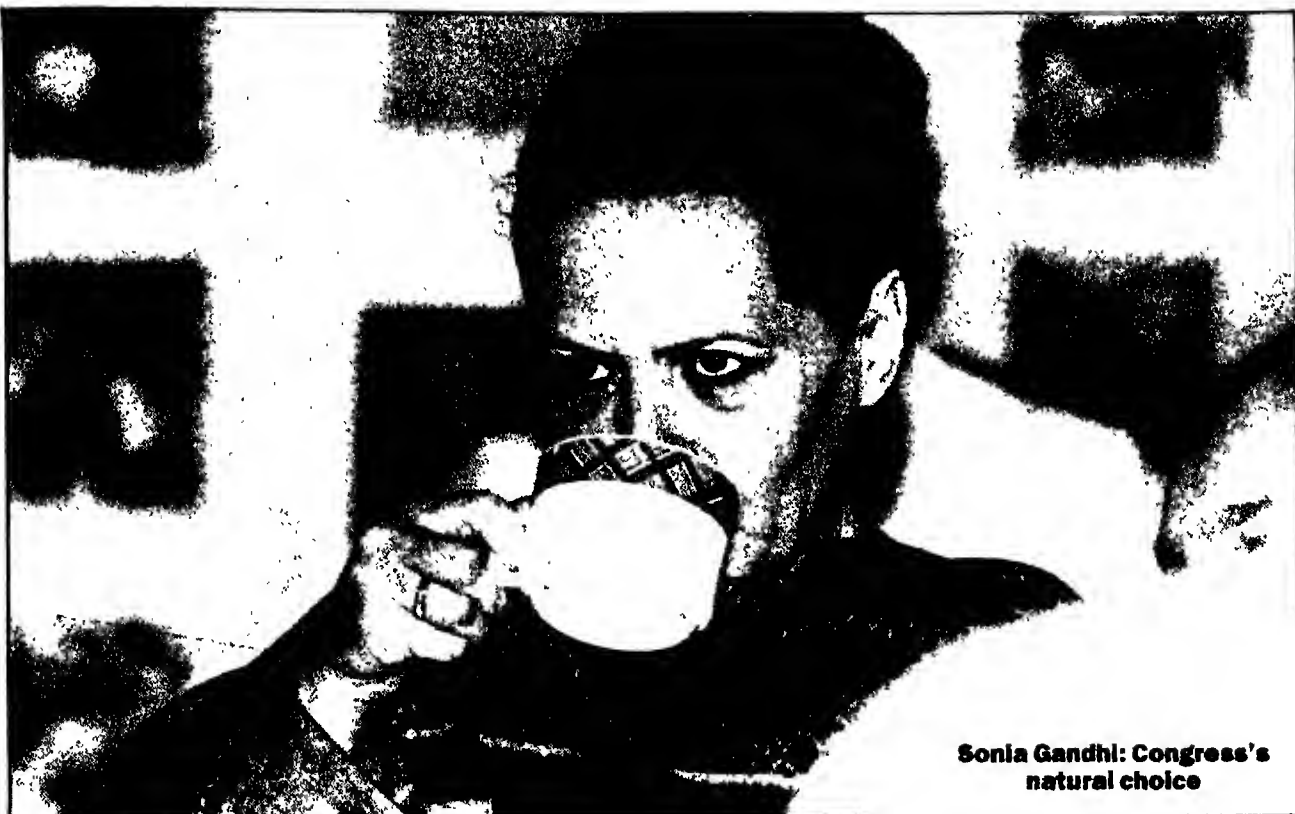
Singh says the BIP has made a major mistake in tying India's economic fortunes to its political ones. The economy is now hinged on friendly relations with the United States. If something were to go wrong, "he says grimly.

His car reaches home. We're in a different world altogether. Bearded *gholawal* float in and out. Here the argument is: how should public opinion be studied and changed. University students are chattering away. His daughter Damini, eyes shining, says some day she will write a book about ways of changing public opinion. Why not set up a 'Friends of Manmohan' stall in Gymkhana Club? Why not indeed? And one in the PVR cinema complex, which is regularly visited by university students?

You can see Singh take a mental gulp as he returns to the threshold of this world, its idealism, sophistication and finesse. It is a world of fine things and good people, it offers academic choices and political options.

And you can see, as real life reaches out to touch him, Singh is pausing to stop and think where he belongs.

Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi



Sonia Gandhi: Congress's natural choice

Manmohan vs Sonia

Should the Congress come to power, who gets to be Prime Minister?

The all-party meeting had just ended. Congress leaders were the first to leave the Prime Minister's residence at Race Course Road. Both Sonia Gandhi and Dr Manmohan Singh had attended the briefing that followed after India shot down the Pakistani Atlantique aircraft.

Waiting outside was the media. As Manmohan Singh stopped to speak in front of the rows of television cameras, someone spied Sonia Gandhi leaving in her car. Immediately the focus shifted. At first Sonia demurred, saying that Dr Singh was already doing the needful. It was pointed out to her that it made little sense in taking a soundbite from a Working Committee member, when the Congress president was also present. Finally she agreed. But the SPG had a problem: due to security reasons, Sonia could not walk to the cameras. The cameras should be brought near the car where she was standing.

Then followed a mad scramble. Dr Singh was rudely interrupted mid-sentence as the cameras were yanked from under his nose. And there was a stampede as the horde rushed towards Sonia. In the melée that followed, the Congress president could barely make herself heard. In the end, neither Sonia Gandhi nor Manmohan Singh got a soundbite across.

This sums up the dilemma of the Congress party. Dr Singh is accessible, but since he has not yet been named as the party's prime ministerial candidate, he has little acceptability. Sonia has the acceptability, but no one has access to her.

If the decision was left to the average Congress worker, he would have no problem. "Of course it is Soniji. We are asking for votes in her name. The manifesto has her picture. How can there be any doubt—she is our prime ministerial candidate," said one such loyalist. Even at the Congress leadership level (such as it

is) there is a consensus around Sonia's name. The reason behind this is not so much out of love for the Nehru-Gandhi *parivar* as for the fact that factionalism within the party will not let another leader rise to the top.

Then, why isn't Sonia declaring herself as the party's prime ministerial candidate? Why is she so insistent that the decision would be taken by the Congress MPs elected to the Lok Sabha?

One reason for this is of course the acceptability factor, that is acceptability among future coalition partners, regardless of what they say on TV, most Congressmen admit that they would not be able to form a government on their own. They will need allies such as the Left, Laloo Yadav, Jayalalitha and even Mulayam Singh. In such a situation, Manmohan Singh would be a more acceptable candidate. Moreover, Sonia has made it clear that she will head a Congress-led government. And not one

REPORT CARD



SONIA GANDHI

Plus: The Gandhi-Nehru name. She is the unquestioned leader of the Congress party. While Congressmen such as Arjun Singh, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Pranab Mukherjee will resent Manmohan Singh's imposition as Prime Minister, they have no such problems with Sonia. More to the point, Sonia has a wide acceptability at the grass-roots level. The villagers see her as the Gandhi *bahu* and will vote for her for that reason alone.

Minus: She has no political experience at all. Moreover, the urban middle class still sees her as a 'foreigner'. As do potential allies such as the

Samajwadi Party. There is also the question of access: part of Vajpayee's charm is that he is one of the most accessible Prime Ministers. Most Congressmen concede that it is impossible to meet Sonia at 10 Janpath. What will happen once she becomes Prime Minister?



MANMOHAN SINGH

Plus: Has a clean image. Has kept away from factional politics within the Congress. Singh is also remembered as the man who ushered in liberalisation — that alone is enough for the urban middle class, which is traditionally anti-Congress. Moreover, should the Congress form a coalition government, Singh's name will win over the requisite allies — Mulayam Singh Yadav has said that he will never support a Congress government that is headed by Sonia Gandhi, but he has not yet ruled out supporting one headed by Manmohan Singh.

Minus: Has no mass base — both at the grass-roots level and within the party. If he does get to be PM, it would be because Sonia Gandhi has decreed it so. In such a situation, he would have a tough time bringing in his own men. Most see that arrangement akin to that of Bal Thackeray and whoever abhors he appoints as chief minister. The remote control will always be with 10 Janpath. Moreover, Singh is also considered too meek and mild to deal with the politics of a coalition government.

which has components such as Mulayam Singh Yadav and (following the debacle at Vilipuram, *see story*) Jayalalitha. In such a situation, it suits her to prop Manmohan Singh at Race Course Road and push the buttons on the remote from 10 Janpath.

There is also the *foreigner* issue. While at the village level Sonia is seen as the Gandhi *bahu* that is not the case with the urban middle class. The BJP is already targetting this section by bringing out a series of bad taste advertisements in English dailies highlighting Sonia Gandhi's Italian origins — such as the one on Quit India day, asking all foreigners to leave India.

Most Congressmen shrug and point out that the urban middle class has never voted for the Congress in the first place. But propping up Manmohan Singh could be one way of winning this vote bank. As the finance minister who brought KFC and Reebok to India, he has tremendous goodwill amongst this section of society. Which is the reason why Dr Singh has been asked to contest the Lok Sabha elections from South Delhi — a predominantly middle class constituency.

And it's not that Singh is without prime ministerial ambitions. He will of course never admit this for he knows how close he is to the top job and he doesn't want to make any mistakes. So whenever he is asked the crucial question he smiles and says, 'I am only a candidate from South Delhi. I haven't thought beyond this.' But the fact that he has agreed to enter the heat and dust of a Lok Sabha election (at a time when he still has a sizeable term left in the Rajya Sabha) shows that Dr Singh is not without political ambition. By agreeing to face the people for the first time in his life Dr Singh is taking his first, however tentative and hesitant, step towards Race Course Road.

So far the Congress is maintaining the fallacy that it is the newly elected Congress MPs who will decide. The reality is that if the Congress gets even less than its present tally, or increases marginally — in which case it will be the allies who will dictate terms to the Congress — the party's prime ministerial candidate will be Manmohan Singh. But, if it is in a position to dictate terms to its allies, then of course, the newly elected CPP will choose Sonia as its leader.

That's how the Congress is playing the game.

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

Purge the polity

Vote for clean candidates cutting across party lines



As the election dates are nearing, political parties have again become busy wooing the Indian masses. Except for some realignment, a few party switch-overs and a couple of new issues like the 'foreigner' and Kargil, not much has changed in the political arena since the last election.

Voters, this time, too, are disillusioned. Too many elections, too much political noise and a constant atmosphere of instability have already cost the nation heavily. Now, people want relief, a stable and good government and nice people at the helm of affairs.

Gradually, it's observed, people are losing faith in the political system because of the tainted politicians, who have not got any sympathy for the common man and are instead only promoting their own interests. The situation is so grave that most people believe all politicians are bad and are just looting the country.

However, this is not true. There are a number of good politicians who are being overshadowed by the bad ones. In every Lok Sabha, 60 per cent of the MPs are nice, non-controversial and by and large clean, but because of the remaining 40 per cent all the MPs are earning a bad reputation. This needs to be corrected and this can only be achieved by the people.

Also, the fault is on the part of the people. It is they who vote for criminals, illiterate persons, mafias, defectors and corrupt people because of considerations of caste, creed, religion, influence, money, etc. If people stop voting them, we will be having mostly good people in our polity.

While casting our vote without thinking along party, caste or religious lines, we should elect the most deserving candidates who are educated, honest, efficient and committed to national values and society. It is most amazing that no political party has included population

control in its agenda or manifesto while this is the most urgent step to be taken in the interest of the nation.

There are not many good candidates, but still there are several of them cutting across party lines who must win. The list goes as — Manmohan Singh, Yashwant Sinha, P. Chidambaram, Jaipal Reddy, Karan Singh, Jagmohan and Sunil Dutt, among others. If we have hundred such people in our Lok Sabha, nothing will go wrong. If these people don't get elec-

Arun Nehru, Mayawati, Madhukar Sarpatdar and M.K. Subba, to name a few, must be taught a lesson.

If people like Chandrababu Naidu lose in Assembly elections, then no chief minister would ever dare to be a performer. All chief ministers will be thinking that people do not vote for good performance. At the same time, voters should not provide a handle to Naidu to become a power centre in Delhi to control the Union government — which



There are several good candidates like Manmohan Singh, Yashwant Sinha, P. Chidambaram, Jaipal Reddy, Karan Singh and Jagmohan among others, who must win

ted, it means there is something wrong with us and we do not want good people to be in Indian politics.

This is also an important responsibility of the voters that such candidates must be defeated who join politics to make money, live lavishly and take the political system for granted. They defect according to their own convenience and think that voters are fools. People like

means while voting for the Lok Sabha they should only vote for national parties like the Congress or the BJP.

As far as T.N. Seshan is concerned, it is very difficult to say anything. The person who wanted to contest the presidential election has come down to the Lok Sabha, that too against L.K. Advani who used to be his best friend during Narasimha Rao's time. •

Battle of the

The election scene heats up in Karnataka. But the voters are not that enthused

With two 'star' candidates contesting against each other from Karnataka, the state has assumed greater significance as it prepares itself for a battle between the two heavyweights.

The battle between Sonia Gandhi, Congress president and Sushma Swaraj, the BJP *swadeshi* mascot, may just be the beginning of an election that will prove crucial to the entire country.

As Karnataka goes to the polls both parties have more at stake — with both Assembly and parliamentary elections being held at the same time. For both it is a matter of two governments — one at the state and the other at the Centre. Hence the hysteria.

However, both have had their set of problems. The Bharatiya Janata Party after a messy seat adjustment is still trying to reconcile to the fact that the breakaway Janata Dal led by chief minister J.H. Patil is now an alliance partner and that the elections are being fought on a shared platform.

"The party's state unit resents the deal completely, so much so that we find it extremely difficult to generate the same enthusiasm for election related work," complains a senior BJP leader in the state. Another fear that looms large over the BJP is the fact that the Congress will gain the most out of this situation.

While the BJP and Lok Shakti combine had increased its vote percentage considerably in the 1998 parliamentary elections, political analysts feel that any kind of division of vote between the Janata Dal (United) and the Janata Dal (Secular) will favour the Congress party in this election.

The reuniting of former friends Ramakrishna Hegde and J.H. Patil may have meant a few happy moments of togetherness (for old time's sake), but



this is definitely giving the BJP some sleepless nights.

"Lugging the weight of a totally discredited government, which we had been ridiculing all along, can be a tough job," complains a BJP worker. "And unfortunately, to the central leadership only the parliamentary elections matter. The idea of fielding Sushma from Bellary reflects their great concern for forming the government at the Centre," he adds.

These fears are not unfounded. With Bellary as the choice of the Congress president, the state has become more important than it otherwise would have been for both parties.

The BJP claims that for it Bellary is a fight for *swabhimaan* (self-respect). As far as the Congress is concerned, it is a

matter of *survival*.

The Congress party has already cut off all ties with the Janata Dal (Secular), the faction led by former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda.

Despite Gowda's repeated trips to 10 Janpath, no pre-poll alliance has been worked out. "The Congress leadership is keeping its options open," says a party worker. "We cannot antagonise our workers by having any pre-poll understanding with the JD(S) but in case we are short of a few seats we can expect support from the JD(S) in a post-poll scenario," he adds.

The Congress may have worked out its strategy well but its choice of candidates and ticket distribution may be just the beginning of trouble for the party.

heavyweights



The fight between Sonia Gandhi, Congress president and Sushma Swaraj, the BJP *swadeshi* mascot, may be the beginning of an election that will prove crucial to the country

Many of the aspirants who have not managed tickets this time are already carrying their grudge to their respective areas of influence. Besides, what has upset a few of the workers is the party's choice of candidates.

"On the one hand we have been harping on a drive against corruption and on the other, we end up giving tickets to candidates with the most dubious of backgrounds," complains a senior state Congress leader.

A communication gap between the state and the central leadership also poses a problem. With state Congress president S.M. Krishna as the sole representative — who is known to be 'not so pushy' — party workers are not too happy with Ghulam Nabi Azad being put in charge of the state.

"With people like C.K. Jaffer Sharief and Ghulam Nabi Azad the Congress party has no business to talk about leaders with clean records," adds an

angry party worker. But the regular back-biting and politicking apart, so far at the Assembly level the BJP-JD(U) tie-up has been a shot in the arm for the Congress.

The Congress is optimistic of forming H.D. Deve Gowda: trips unsuccessful



BJP's vote share

1991: Went up to 28 per cent yielding just four Lok Sabha seats

1994: Dipped to 17 per cent bringing in 39 Assembly seats

1996: Peaked to 26 per cent getting six Lok Sabha seats

1998: The BJP-Lok Shakti combine secured 16 seats with 38.2 per cent of the votes

ing the government in the state. "There is no stopping the Congress," says R.V. Deshpande of the Congress. "We are going to win with a thumping majority because the people are fed up with the Janata Dal and the BJP," he adds.

However, one issue that is staring the party in the eye is whom to project as the chief ministerial candidate? Margaret Alva, Delhi's candidate for chief ministership, has already backed out of the fray by contesting for the Canara parliamentary constituency. But many in the party feel that this could just be an eye-wash to keep party workers in a better frame of mind. While the central leadership thrashes out the more contentious issues, this may figure later in its list of priorities.

The irony of the situation, however, is that the voters who are being taken for granted are smarter than what these parties imagine them to be. For instance, a resident of Bellary says, "I will vote Congress for the Assembly elections and BJP for the Parliament irrespective of what the parties say. I feel that's the best combination as far as we are concerned."

Though the parties are busy with their meaningless rhetoric, the voters have already made up their minds. And the irony is that while all this is being done to catch the voters' attention, they seem to have little patience or time for yet another election. •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore

Up until 15 August this year, Siachen was the most highly decorated and commemorated battleground of Indian military history. And on Siachen it was Bana post, the one most coveted by both sides, that received the largest number of gallantry awards: one PVC, one MVC, three VrCs and six Sena Medals shared by two battalions — 8 J&K LI and 3/4 Gurkha Rifles.

Before 1987, this post called Qaid was in Pakistani possession till Subedar Bana Singh and his men captured it. After this debacle, Benazir Bhutto used to taunt Gen Zia-ul-Haq about losing Siachen and suggested he wear a burkha. Now, after the loss of Kargil, the women in Pakistan are asking Nawaz Sharif to wear bangles.

Because on 15 August, Siachen, although higher in meters, was superseded in sheer numbers of gallantry awards by Kargil. The haul on these icy heights was the biggest ever.

Kargil is now the most richly decorated real estate in the world. Some of its key heights first captured in 1948 were recaptured twice in 1965 and both times returned to Pakistan after the Kutch and Tashkent Agreements. In 1971, these were retaken. At least three MVCs, two VrCs and other smaller awards were won by Kargil.

In 1999, Kargil has hit the jackpot. Never before have so many gallantry awards been conferred in such a confined space, restricted to three mountain ridges in Dras and Batalik: Tololing, Tiger Hill and Juber-Khalubar. Equally, never before has the intensity of combat been so fierce, terrain so difficult and the enemy so defiant.

There are some outstanding features in the battles that have been recognised in the awards list. Many brave actions, however, have gone unsung and got buried in the debris of fire. These are the uncharmed heroes, the unheralded casualties of war — the unknown *jawan*.

Just about 16 of the army's more than 360 infantry battalions were employed in combat at Kargil. The history of successes in battle will be written around half-a-dozen key heights: Tololing, Tiger Hill, Point 5140 and Point 4875 in Dras and Khalubar-Juber in Batalik. These Bofors-battered mountain peaks have been honoured for their impregnability and dogged determination with an

Handle W



unprecedented galaxy of gallantry awards — four PVCs, nine MVCs, 61 VrCs and scores of Sena Medals besides distinguished bravery awards for senior officers.

Nearly 60 per cent of the awards are posthumous, including the needless media overkill and needling of one regrettable posthumous error. Perhaps the most striking feature of the Kargil gallantry list is the exceptionally high percentage of winners below officer rank. For example, two of the four PVCs are 19-year-old *jawans*. This is not only unprecedented, it is also unique. Simi-

Jawans in Kargil: the most striking feature of the Kargil gallantry list is the exceptionally high percentage of winners below officer rank

larly, 39 VrCs are JCOs and other ranks.

The battalions that have bagged the awards are those who provided a foothold on the key ridges and later fought their way up, peak by peak, destroying the enemy. 2 Raj Rif, 18 Grenadiers, 13 JaK Rif, 17 Jat and 1/11 GR lead the list followed by other battalions including the Ladakh Scouts. Four MVCs and several VrCs for 2 Raj Rif and two

ith Care

*An award for
gallantry is more than
a headline in the
newspapers*



PVCs and many Vrcs for 13 JaK Rif are feats of gutsy bravery unknown to a single battalion. Skill and audacity in battle are difficult to fathom and quantify.

In addition to individual awards, there were immediate unit citations and peaks and sectors dedicated to units and individuals like renaming Point 4875 as OP Hill and Turtuk as Hanif sub-sector.

Gallantry awards, unit citations and other outstanding achievements are the heart and soul of army units. These become benchmarks in regimental history and the lifeline of their tradition. A PVC or VC (before Independence) becomes a rare breed, zealously protected and pre-

served by the army and hopefully honoured by state and society.

Six years ago, Capt. Umrao Singh VC, went for the VC reunion to London. After attending the public meeting at Hyde Park, he was trying to cross the road when he discovered he had caused a traffic jam. British defence secretary Michael Heseltine, recognising the VC bronze medal pinned on his chest, jumped out of his car, saluted Umrao and said: VC first, Sir.

Queen Victoria, it is said, had knit half-a-dozen scarves, rated higher than the VC, which were meant for gallantry in war. But the acts of gallantry were to be determined not by the government but by the officers and men of the unit in action. Will Sonia Gandhi or Usha

Kargil is now the most richly decorated real estate in the world. Never before have so many gallantry awards been conferred in such a confined space. Equally, never before has the intensity of combat been so fierce, terrain so difficult and the enemy so defiant

Narayanan knit such scarves, asks a military historian?

The solemnity of the awards has been marred by some needlessly insensitive journalism — *Army kills another Hero Resurrects a Captain* and so on. The army admitted making a mistake about giving Sepoy Yoginder Singh Yadav of 18 Grenadiers a posthumous PVC when he was recovering in the

Base Hospital Delhi. A senior general even put in his papers for the faux pas.

There was some haste but greater urgency in processing the gallantry list. The vetting of the list starts with the battalion and is filtered at at least six levels before being finalised by the Chief of Army Staff. It then goes to the Prime Minister via the defence minister for the seal and signature of the President.

In 5 Platoon of Bravo Company of 18 Grenadiers there are two Yoginder Singh Yadavs. Only one of them along with Lt. Balwan Singh of the same company (who won the MVC), climbed up the fixed rope from the northeast face of Tiger Hill and stayed on top to singlehandedly prove his valour despite being wounded. The other Yadav had been killed earlier. The PVC went to the right and deserving Yadav. The mix-up occurred when a smart alec, burning the midnight oil at Command Headquarters, mysteriously added the word 'posthumous' at the last minute.

But there was absolutely no need for journalists to go scouring for the dead Yadav's family at Hastinapur, pouring salt over fatal wounds. This is the first time that gallantry awards have been announced immediately after the war, when the established procedure to declassify the list is once a year on Republic Day.

The highest gallantry award winner, always an endangered species, has two young inductees to swell its dwindling ranks to four. At the very least, they will both serve another 28 years, be pampered and, as per army regulations, be left out of battle in future. That is the fate of *jawans* turned into icons.

In 1961, the three-VC winner 2/5 GR (called the VC *paltan*), was selected for UN peacekeeping in Congo. The two living legends were debarred from the assignment till the unit secured a special government dispensation for them. It was marked: Handle with Care. •

(The author was a general officer commanding of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in southern Sri Lanka. He is the founder-member of the Defence Planning Staff of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.)

All parties in Tamil Nadu are playing the caste card

The 1996 and 1998 Lok Sabha elections have proved that the 39 MPs from Tamil Nadu play a major role in deciding who will be sworn in as Prime Minister of India. Till the mid-Eighties it was conventional wisdom that the electoral future of India would be settled in the Aryavarta. But the cow belt-centric view of national politics no longer holds.

In 1996, the DMK-TMC combine swept the polls winning all the seats in the state. The process was slightly reversed in 1998 when the newly formed BJP-AIADMK combine with smaller regional outfits like the PMK and the MDMK could muster 30 seats.

But in 1999, the scenario has changed with the BJP and the DMK coming toge-



Moopanar: banking on the Dalits

ther while the AIADMK has cosied up to the Congress, whose candidates lost their deposits in the last election. And for the first time there is a formidable third front consisting of the TMC and the PT.

Unlike previous Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu, this one will be fought on caste lines and not on any issues. All the three fronts have unabashedly wooed and included caste organisations to get that extra edge. In 1996, the DMK-



Casteing

TMC won on an anti-incumbency factor which also brought down the Jayalalitha regime. But by 1998 the Coimbatore blast and the pro-Hindutva wave crushed Karunanidhi as the BJP-AIADMK front won 30 seats.

The last elections saw the death of Dravidian ideology. Now Dravidian parties have no separate moorings. Only survival is important and for that they need to hang on to all-India parties.

Karunanidhi in 1999 is trying to take a leaf out of Jayalalitha's book by embracing the Hindutva line of the BJP and bring together small rabid caste-based parties under one umbrella while Jayalalitha is the empress of the backward class Thevars and Sonia is expected to bring the minority vote-bank along

with her. Not to be left behind, Moopanar has become the new messiah of the Dalits.

For the first time, the three major communities of the state find themselves identified with the three fronts. The Vanniyars dominating north Tamil Nadu, whose political wing is the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), are with the DMK front. The Thevars identify themselves with the AIADMK front, Jayalalitha's friend Sasikala being a Thevar.

The Dalits, who form the single-largest caste bloc, have been identified with the TMC-led front thanks to the presence of PT and three other Dalit outfits in it. Said a DMK leader, "Dravidian ideology and pan-Tamil sentiments do not sell any longer in Tamil Nadu after

Jayalalitha is the empress of the backward class Thevars and Sonia is expected to bring the minority vote-bank along with her



vote

Hindutva made an entry. Now political parties including the CPM are forced to field candidates of the dominant caste in each constituency."

Political leaders themselves are responsible for this caste cauldron. Caste-based parties have been encouraged to enter the fray and raise their stakes because of their vote-banks. In the 1998 elections, Jayalalitha knew that she would ride piggyback on the BJP's Hindutva line after the Coimbatore blasts and rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Tamil Nadu.

But she was not sure of winning in Chennai and northern Tamil Nadu. So she gave five Lok Sabha seats to the PMK, the Vanniyar party, which won

four of them. Now Karunanidhi has given them nine seats and that too mostly in north Tamil Nadu, once a DMK citadel.

According to Dalit Ezhilimalai, the former Union health minister and one of the founders of the PMK, "Dr Ramadoss, the PMK chief, denied me a ticket this time because I was not a Vanniyar. The problem started when a Dalit like me was made a minister and not a Vanniyar who forms the vote-bank of the party."

Ezhilimalai has joined the AIADMK not only because of his admiration for Jayalalitha but also due to the possibility of getting some post in future in a party lacking tall Dalit leaders.

Vazhappadi Ramamurthy of the Tamizhaga Rajiv Congress (TRC) who had a bitter fallout with the PMK's Dr Ramadoss over seat allocation proudly says at election meetings that he has given lakhs of gas connections in his Salem constituency (all connections went to the Vanniyars). The idea is to project himself as a bigger Vanniyar leader than Dr Ramadoss.

Karunanidhi is embracing the Hindutva line of the BJP to bring together small rabid caste-based parties under one umbrella

In Jayalalitha's AIADMK, it is the Thevars who dominate the party as Sasikala pulls the strings from Poes Garden. Dr Krishnaswamy of the PT had earlier tried to work out a coalition between the AIADMK-Congress-PT and the TMC, but it was shot down by Sasikala.

Karunanidhi, now holding hands with his former critic Dr Ramadoss is said to be very happy with the caste arithmetic he has worked out. Recently Karunanidhi kissed and made up with the Bra-

hmans who have their pockets of influence in Chennai and smaller towns.

Earlier the DMK was known to be a party of Brahmin-baiters and it was said that they would vote only for Jayalalitha, a Brahmin Today, BJP, the Brahminical party, has come into the DMK fold and the DMK also feels that as a section of the Thevars admire Vajpayee especially after the Kargil war, it can neutralise Jayalalitha's support in that community.

Suddenly Moopanar and his TMC-led Progressive People's Front are not only confusing pollsters but also creating tension in the other two fronts. After a messy seat-allocation drama with PT, they brought in other fringe

Dalit parties into the fold.

In 1998, PT contested in 11 constituencies and polled over 4.50 lakh votes. Though it failed to win even one seat it could cross the one lakh figure in two constituencies and acted as spoilers for the DMK-TMC combine. So the theory is if PT can swing Dalit votes in its favour in certain pockets, for other smaller caste outfits the same would apply.

Take the case of Dalit Panthers, which derives its support from the Parayars in the northern districts. The TMC finds them useful in this traditional Vanniyar belt. So the TMC which had no clear identity and looked confined to a poor third spot has now brought about a consolidation of the Dalit votes.

Surprisingly Moopanar is getting a spontaneous response in Dalit areas. He makes it clear at every meeting that Dalit consolidation is taking place as a natural phenomenon in this election as they feel that they had been sidelined in the last three decades.

This sort of caste-based electioneering has created tension. Moopanar's convoy was attacked allegedly by goons of some Thevar outfit at Usilampatti. In south Tamil Nadu, a violent caste war has been going on between the Thevars and the Dalits for the last few years. Leaders of the Tamil Nadu Mukkalathor Peravai, a Thevar outfit, were arrested for stoning Moopanar's convoy and for threatening a roadblock if he garlanded

SONIA VERSUS JAYA

The alliance shows signs of cracking up already

It was billed as the coming together of two women who could save the BJP-DMK juggernaut in Tamil Nadu. The national and international media had descended at Villupuram, a dusty small town 160 km south of Chennai, to witness the first joint election meeting of Sonia Gandhi and Jayalalitha. However, the lady of Poonchi Garden has not turned up and made a prospective future Prime Minister wait for more than 45 minutes.

Finally, the SFG intervened and asked Sonia to postpone her meeting before 6 pm, as her helicopter could take off before dusk. For the record, ADADMK spokesman attributed Jayalalitha's inability to join Sonia to her delay owing to the "sea of humanity that had come to see Jayalalitha as she was on her way to Villupuram".

Was Jayalalitha's absence pre-planned and aimed at insulting the Congress? This question is being asked by the Congress party workers. According to a Congress candidate present at Villupuram, "Jayalalitha was incensed over Manmohan Singh's interview to STAR TV where he said that those found to be corrupt, whether Laloo Yadav or Jayalalitha, should be punished".

A day before the Villupuram fiasco, Prime Minister Atal Bihari

Vajpayee said at an NDA meeting on Marina Beach at Chennai that doing political business with Jayalalitha was the most painful period of his political life. Now Sonia after her humiliation would agree with Vajpayee. It does not take unduly long for Jayalalitha's friends to turn into foes.

The previous evening Jayalalitha was about 15 km away from Villupuram on her campaign tour. So why did she have to return to Chennai? She had to be in Chennai on the morning of 21 August, the day of the launch of Jaya TV, her pet project. But she was to start from Chennai around 11.30 am for Villupuram—a three-hour drive. Still she started out

at 3.25 pm and after travelling for about 30 km abandoned her plans and spoke to Sonia on the mobile.

SUNDAY understands that Jayalalitha lost interest in going to Villupuram because she came to know only in the morning that Rahul Gandhi was accompanying his mother and at an earlier meeting at Tiruchirappalli, Sonia was said to be "flaming Rahul" who was only waving at the crowd.

Jayalalitha in the past has been critical of "dynasty rule". She had grudgingly agreed to share the election meeting with Sonia. At her own rallies, there would be only one shroo-like chair for Jayalalitha on the dais while others would have to stand. It would be impossible for her to share the spotlight with a novice like Rahul.

However, Congress leaders put on a brave front and insisted that all was well.

Sonia and Jayalalitha: unexpected alliance fails





Congressmen in private though admit that for all practical purposes the alliance seems to be over. The Congress is of course riding piggy-back on the AIADMK, which may explain Jayalalitha's arrogance. But it has pockets of influence where it can muster about 50,000 votes that may prove crucial in constituencies which were won by less than 3,000 votes. The AIADMK is going to be the loser in constituencies like Chengalpattu, Tirupattur and Cuddalore where the Congress alone got more than 25,000 votes.

In fact, if Jayalalitha and Sonia do not campaign jointly and more effectively, it could be a disaster for the BJP-DMK combine.

Jayalalitha lost interest in going to Villupuram because she came to know that Rahul Gandhi was accompanying his mother and it would be impossible for her to share the spotlight with a novice like him

the Pasumpon Muthuramalingar Thevar statue near Usilampatti

Mooppanar and Krishnaswamy feel that they can cause upsets in at least three Lok Sabha seats in southern Tamil Nadu. Earlier there was no organisation of the Dalits who form nearly 20 per cent of the electorate in the state. Now, with the emergence of organisations such as the PT and Dalit Panthers the entire complexion of the Dalit vote-bank has changed.

The BJP, too, has been unable to resist the caste fling. It has roped in small Thevar outfits for campaigning. Some of the soldiers who died in Kargil are said to be Thevars. So leaders like Shanmuga Pandian, responsible for a spate of caste clashes, are campaigning for the BJP-led front.

Sreedhar Pillai/Chennai

Sparring partners

BJP's Uma Bharati has to fight her own party, along with the Congress, to emerge as a winner from Bhopal

Burning their own leaders' effigies has become a favourite past time for Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) workers in Madhya Pradesh. So when the BJP announced that it had nominated Uma Bharati as its candidate from Bhopal in the coming elections, a section of disgruntled party workers protested. They gave vent to their discontent by setting fire to her effigy in the heart of the state capital.

While all this was going on in Bhopal, Uma was in Delhi. Undeterred by this show of defiance, she left for Bhopal because contesting and winning the seat from the state capital also meant conquering the BJP in Madhya Pradesh. It has one more outcome—finishing off the Kushabhau Thakre group in the state. So when Uma Bharati finally set her foot in Bhopal, her supporters ensured she got a huge welcome, possibly to compensate for the effigy burning incident.

The BJP in Madhya Pradesh has had its share of effigy-burning. In the past the BJP rank and file had burnt the effigies of Sunder Singh Bhandari when, a few years back, he replaced Kushabhau Thakre as the general secretary in charge of state politics. Then, during organisational elections, it was the turn of burning Thakre's effigies. This happened when a section of the party accused him of being partial. (At that time, he had again become the general secretary in charge of MP politics. Later, Thakre went on to become the BJP president.)

Thakre, known for his antipathy towards Uma Bharati, had tried every trick in the bag to ensure that she was not nominated from Bhopal. He wanted her

to go to her old constituency of Khajuraho. But Uma Bharati did not want to go back to Khajuraho apparently because of poor health. She said she was suffering from spondylitis and the bumpy roads of Khajuraho would make her life even more miserable.

But Thakre remained adamant. When the BJP announced that Uma Bharati would contest from Khajuraho, she decided to opt out of the race. But Uma's sights were already set on Bhopal. Sources in the BJP say that the party presi-



'Digvijay Singh is scared of me'

Uma Bharati joins the battle for Bhopal

From the moment she landed in Bhopal, Uma Bharati plunged straight into what she does best: electioneering. She moved around in a maroon-silver Tata Safari. And at the end of her hectic and gruelling schedule, the firebrand BJP leader finally found time to speak to SUNDAY. Excerpts from the interview:

SUNDAY: How did you find Bhopal? **Uma Bharati:** It is a very good city with very good people. They look at me with affection. They love me.

Q: And what is the response of the BJP workers after the effigy-burning incident?

A: First of all, let me make it clear that those who burnt the effigies were not BJP workers. A BJP worker cannot indulge in this type of act. As far as their response is concerned, there is a lot of confusion in them. They are working very hard...as if they were waiting for me.

Q: Do you think you will get the support of all sections of the party? **A:** Definitely.

Q: Why did you go for Bhopal as your constituency?

A: I never did...it was my party. I was not at all interested in contesting elections this time.



Q: But you said you were not interested in Khajuraho...

A: (interrupts) There were three problems in Khajuraho. You see, I formed the party in Khajuraho; it is a constituency of 3,300 villages and they talk to me directly. They don't talk to the *panch*, the *sarpanch* or the MLAs. There's nobody in between us...because the MLAs are also my creation.

Then what happened, you know. I feel guilty when I'm not able to devote time. I have neurological problem and you know those who have problems like cervical spondylitis also become emotional. So, I have physical problem, emotional problem and then I'm not able to devote time.

Q: But it is believed that the whole unit of Khajuraho BJP is up in arms against you...

A: (interrupts again) Bilkul

jhoot...itna jhoota aur bhayanak propaganda hua hai bhaiya...mein aap logon ke hath jodti hoon (It is a lie and a dangerous propaganda; I beg of you). You go there and see for yourself

Q: Who is doing it?

A: Digvijay Singh. Because if he is scared of someone in Madhya Pradesh, it's me. He is spending a lot on this propaganda. The rumour mill is working overtime in Bhopal. Digvijay tried everything against me...an OBC, Brahmin, Thakur...He kept on telephoning me, asking me whether I'm contesting and when he finally came to know I'm not, he announced his candidate.

Q: The Congress is scared that you will polarise the votes in Bhopal.

A: Rubbish. You will see, Muslims will vote me. I'm confident. I trust that they will go for me. •

Uma Bharati: a lot at stake

dent knew about this.

Thakre then floated the name of Kailash Joshi as a candidate from Bhopal. Joshi was a former chief minister. He also belonged to the camp which was opposed to Thakre. Moreover, he was close to Uma Bharati.

On numerous earlier occasions, Uma Bharati had said that after Advani, Joshi was the man she respected most in the party. This time, though Joshi's name was not announced formally, supporters of Thakre leaked out the news to the press. Kailash Joshi, who lost for the first time in the Vidhan Sabha election last year, was convinced that he would be the BJP's chosen man from Bhopal. But things turned out differently. Uma Bharati succeeded in getting the ticket from Bhopal and Thakre was humbled in his home turf.

However, according to BJP sources, there was more than what met the eye.



JAGDISH YADAV

Digvijay Singh: will he gain?

As Thakre knew that the Sadhvi was gunning for the Bhopal seat, he deliberately wanted Joshi to be his candidate from the city. Thakre wanted to create a rift between Joshi and Bharati, sources pointed out.

"Though Uma Bharati succeeded in outsmarting Thakre once again, the latter has been successful in creating the rift," party sources pointed out. The other group in the BJP — comprising Kailash Joshi, Laxmi Narayan Pandey, Narayan Prasad Gupta, Pyarelal Khadwal, Laxmanarayan Sharma, Babulal Gaur and others — has always been unhappy with Thakre. They felt that the

BJP president had a soft corner for Sunderlal Patwa, who is now the party's national vice-president. Patwa, this time, is contesting from the neighbouring Hoshangabad constituency.

During BJP's organisational polls in Madhya Pradesh in 1997, Thakre was interested in making Patwa the state unit president. And this had irked Uma Bharati. "She did not allow Patwa to become

contest the elections at all. Things came to such a pass that L.K. Advani and Prime Minister Vajpayee had to intervene to sort the matter out. Vajpayee himself reportedly telephoned Kailash Joshi, persuading him to withdraw.

"I feel hurt and humiliated," says Kailash Joshi. "But I will continue to work for the party. I never asked for the ticket; they asked me to contest," Joshi clari-

seat. The next day, however, another effigy of Bharati was set ablaze.

To counter this, Bharati's supporters took out a procession. Party sources also alleged that some of those who burnt Bharati's effigy belonged to the RPI (Republican Party of India). But those who carried out the job claimed that they were BJP workers. The party, however, continues to disown them.

Supporters of Bharati say that the miscreants belonged to the Patwa camp. "Supporters of Kailash Joshi just cannot do such things," they alleged. According to Uma Bharati, she would ask Joshi about the incident and without his *aashirwad* she would not contest. "I can leave the *Indraasan* (the throne of Lord Indra) for Joshi," says Bharati. She reportedly went to his house and found him "ill". "By deciding to contest from Bhopal, Uma Bharati has in fact decided to take on the Patwa camp head on," says a senior BJP leader.

Perhaps, it is going to be a contest between two generations — Uma Bharati is around 39 while Patwa is in his early 70s. "You will see the dawn of a new BJP in Madhya Pradesh" says a party functionary. "The fight is within. She has to first fight the BJP itself."

Her opponents, on the other hand, say that Uma Bharati still wants to become the chief minister and for that her presence in Bhopal is a must. "If she thinks she can take on Patwa in Bhopal, she is definitely underestimating his strength," says Patwa's supporters.

The Sadhvi, on the other hand, refuses all this "rubbish". "I was happy in Khajuraho. The people there love me a lot. It is a constituency of 3,300 villages and they talk to me directly," Uma Bharati pointed out. She first contested from Khajuraho in 1984 when it was a stronghold of socialists. She built the party in Khajuraho and went on winning all the elections from the region.

"She now wants to build her party in Bhopal," sums up a senior BJP leader. Uma says she wants to develop Bhopal like a real state capital. "It is marvellous in its natural beauty. But beneath the veneer there is nothing."

So for Uma Bharati, it is either victory or defeat. The quirk is: in this electoral battle it is not only the Congress which she is taking on, but also a section of her own party. Whichever way it goes, with the Saffron Sadvi around, the elections in Bhopal can never be devoid of colours. •

Deeshdeep Saxena/Bhopal



Kushabhau Thakre tried to ensure that Uma Bharati was not nominated from Bhopal. He wanted her to go to her old constituency of Khajuraho. But Uma Bharati did not want to go back to Khajuraho

the state party president though he was backed by Thakre," says a senior BJP leader. Nand Kumar Sai was made a compromise candidate and he was a puppet in the hands of Patwa and Co.

After being installed as the state president, Sai decided to drop some senior leaders from the party executive. Uma Bharati revolted. And the revolt was directed at Thakre because he was still the man in-charge of Madhya Pradesh BJP. Uma Bharati, along with Kailash Joshi and three more senior party leaders, resigned from the executive.

The old bickering between Thakre and Uma Bharati continues. This time Uma was adamant that she would either contest from Bhopal or would not

fied. Joshi is considered a sincere and saintly leader in Madhya Pradesh BJP.

Immediately after the announcement of Uma Bharati's candidature, some BJP workers jumped into four jeeps and went straight to Deendayal Parisar, the party office, and started shouting slogans against her. Despite the rain in the afternoon, they took an effigy out of one of the cars and doused it with kerosene, before setting it ablaze. "Uma Bharati hai, hai," they shouted.

Some of these workers were apprehended by the staff manning the office. State BJP leaders later alleged that these workers owed their allegiance to Arif Aqueel, a Congress MLA from Bhopal, and Suresh Pachauri, the Congress candidate from the Bhopal parliamentary

American plan

The US comes down heavily on India's draft nuclear doctrine



Washington has lost no time in coming down heavily on this country's draft nuclear doctrine, prepared for discussion and debate by the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and yet to be adopted by the government and Parliament. The blast from the US was not a case of knee-jerk reaction but evidently a well-orchestrated one,

as the White House, the state department, and the Pentagon have all gone on the attack. What this does to the nuclear dialogue between India and the US, paintakingly conducted by Jaswant Singh and US deputy secretary of state Strobe Talbott, is a serious matter but will be discussed presently. First, I must ask what the American enunciation of the perfectly sensible Indian document on nuclear doctrine does to the euphoric talk in New Delhi's corridors of power about a "paradigm change", a "historic turning point" and a "watershed" in Indo-American relations.

V. RAJAGOPAL



The most productive and encouraging outcome of the Jaswant-Talbott parleys had been America's willingness to live with this country's credible minimum nuclear deterrent. Is the US going back on this understanding?

Had only a few rude remarks been made by the spokesman of the state department, James Rubin, one could have thought that the US was merely repeating its declaratory policy on non-proliferation, and that the good work done during the Jaswant-Talbott talks could be preserved behind the smokescreen of overblown rhetoric. But that is far from being the case, with US President Bill Clinton shooting off letters to Atal Behari Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif, and the harsh words against the draft nuclear doctrine being followed by threats of tightening of sanctions that were supposed to be in the process of being

relaxed.

There can be no other meaning of the talk in the US capital that international financial institutions will once again be "discouraged" from making loans and grants to India. More important is the demand that during the UN General Assembly's session (at a time when India would be in the throes of elections), Jaswant Singh should explain things to Talbott or even his boss, Madeleine Albright. Bilateral discussions between this country and the US are of course a must. But the invitation to them could have come in a pleasanter way.

It is no secret that the most productive and encouraging outcome of the Jaswant-Talbott parleys has been America's willingness to live with this country's credible minimum nuclear deterrent. This was conditional, of course, on India becoming a "responsible" member of the US-led international non-proliferation order. Both sides were confident, however, that Indian concerns over its nuclear security and American concerns about proliferation could be married to each other, and the world's mightiest and largest democracies could find a nuclear meeting ground.

Is the US going back on this understanding? For, it has now renewed the absurd hyperbole that, far from increasing India's security, nuclear weapons will erode it and therefore India (and Pakistan) should give up these weapons. The draft doctrine, according to Washington, will "heighten tensions".

Never mind the incongruity and hypocrisy that a country which insists that its nuclear weapons are absolutely essential for its security, a country, moreover, which refuses to accept the principle of No First Use and considers it legitimate to use nuclear weapons even against non-nuclear countries in certain circumstances, should be telling us that nuclear weapons are bad for us. The pertinent point is whether Delhi-Washington relations are back to where they were on the morrow of Pokhran-II.

The timing of the current eruption in Indo-US relations over the sensitive nuclear issue is awkward and inconvenient for several reasons. First, Pakistan is bound to think it has got a godsend to wipe out the humiliation of Kargil. It will do all it can to fuel American apprehensions of a possible nuclear exchange over Kashmir. This, in its calculation, will end Pakistan's isolation, perhaps drive a wedge between India and the US, and put Kashmir once again on the international agenda.

This challenge India could have met more easily but for the second implication of the current timing of the row. With the election-driven political discord in the country at its crescendo, the draft nuclear doctrine has been sharply attacked within the country too. Not for anything it says (though the American fear of an arms race has been repeated by the Congress) but because of the suspicion that the BJP wants to reap a bumper harvest of votes with the nuclear scythe. Foreigners out to pressurise India thus have an edge. And this is regrettably a creation of the BJP. Since 11 May, 1998, little has been done to build national consensus on the nuclear issue. •

Political heavyweights Farooq Abdullah and Mufti Mohammad Syed prepare for a battle royal in Kashmir

FAMILY

Former Union home minister Mufti Mohammad Syed has been a mnemonic, something of a thorn in the flesh, as far as Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah's family is concerned. Even in his heydays, the late Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah who ruled the hearts of Kashmiri people for as long as he was in charge of the state's administration (they called him Sher-e-Kashmir, as a mark of respect), never felt comfortable with Mufti's presence somewhere on the state's political spectrum.

For the Abdullahs and their family outfit National Conference, Mufti has proved to be a 'master manipulator' whose beguiling skills felled them thrice. In 1977, the Congress withdrew support from Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah's minority government. In 1984, it split the National Conference only to dislodge Farooq Abdullah from power. In 1990, Jagmohan was sent as governor to the state which led to Farooq Abdullah's resignation from the government. The Abdullah family believes that behind all these setbacks and reverses that they have suffered, one man has been instrumental: Mufti Mohammad Syed.

And just when it looked as if the era of manipulative politics in Jammu and Kashmir was over, or so the Abdullah family and the National Conference believed, out came Mufti again, more threatening and more vociferous than ever. Not as a behind-the-scenes or a distant player this time, but as a performer, leading from the front. Ever since Mufti walked out of the Congress last month and formed his own outfit, People's Democratic Party (PDP), he has emerged as a major challenger to the political authority of Farooq Abdullah's National Conference. He is leaving no stones unturned, exploring every possibility, to project the PDP as a 'genuine' alternative to the National Conference, which is at the lowest ebb of its popularity these days.



For chief minister Farooq Abdullah and the National Conference, the party he heads, Mufti Mohammad Syed has proved to be a 'master manipulator' whose beguiling skills felled them thrice

PRIDE

In this battle for supremacy Mufti is audaciously striving to capitalise on the 'follies' and 'failures' of Farooq Abdullah's government, besides exploiting the regional sentiment by raising the bogey of 'dialogue with militants'. Mufti has been advocating initiation of an unconditional dialogue with the separatist forces, including militants, in the Valley. The way to a resolution of the crisis in Jammu and Kashmir, raging for over a decade now, could be arrived at through negotiation, believes Mufti

The regional sentiment has always played a decisive role in determining power and politics in Jammu and Kashmir. This sentiment had all along been homologous with the National Conference. And by that virtue, common folk in Kashmir have always considered the party as representative of Kashmir's sub-nationalism. But that is now a story of the past. The NC have lost credibility in the eyes of the people because of the occasional compromises and the opportunistic trade-off it is alleged to have been involved in. Until they come clean about their position vis-a-vis the charges, the PDP could well be considered as a viable alternative, a party the local people can identify with.

The vulnerability of the NC became apparent for the first time in 1987, during the state Assembly elections. Muslim United Front (MUF), a multi-party alliance of regional political groups, grew in influence and was being looked upon as a sensible choice by the common Kashmiri. The NC, then, was alleged to have resorted to mass rigging to keep its political hegemony and power intact. Many political observers believe that the secessionist movement which is now on, owes its roots to those rigged elections. The MUF constituent now operates under a new banner, All Party Hurriyat Conference, largely responsible for spearheading separatist movement in the Valley.

This time round, an emboldened Mufti has fielded his daughter Mahbooba against the Abdullah family scion, Omar, in the run-for-Parliament in Srina-

Mufti Mohammad Syed is trying to project the People's Democratic Party as a 'genuine' alternative to the National Conference, which is at the lowest ebb of its popularity these days



gar constituency. The contest now has shades of a battle for upholding family prestige. The most-watched constituency in the Valley this elections look all set to assume the proportions of a clan war in which the titans — the Abdullahs and the Muftis — must clash.

Mahbooba is perceived to be the person responsible for giving the PDP its regional colour. She may not be a veteran in politics, yet she had a jet-propelled start. She came to politics just three years ago when she contested Assembly election in 1996 from Bijbehara and emerged victorious against the National Conference nominee. No mean achievement for a political novice. She has followed it up with questioning government policies in the Assembly, and trenchantly criticising chief minister Farooq Abdullah for all the promises he failed to keep or has been too slow in implementing. And in a state where

mainstream politicians usually refrain from commenting on human rights issues, Mahbooba has come down heavily on matters of custodial deaths, indiscriminate arrests and killings. Mufti Mohammad Syed's victory in last year's Lok Sabha polls is being largely considered as a gift of his daughter's new-found gab.

The one major drawback that the PDP has, and Omar Abdullah will obviously try to cash in on, is this. The Valley witnessed the worst kind of torture, suffering and agony when Mufti was home minister during 1989-90. There had been a series of incidents — mass killings, indiscriminate arrests, ferocious crackdowns, torture, blaze and arson — in the capital city of Srinagar in 1990. Mufti's detractors say that the oppression on the city's people was perpetuated by Mufti himself. They allege that this was his way of avenging the abduc-

tion of his daughter Rubia Syed by a group of JKLF militants in December 1989. But since public memory is short-lived, one will have to wait till the poll results are declared to see if this prescription will work.

For all their differences, there is a striking similarity between the Muftis and the Abdullahs, as indeed there are between the parties that they head. Going by their poll speeches and party releases, both the PDP and the NC have a common strategy — soft on militants and hard on the Centre. But then, this seems to be the main poll plank of almost all contesting parties and candidates in the Valley. The National Conference is sharp-tongued, periodically hauling up the Centre for what it alleges to be 'flippant treatment of the state'. In the People's Democratic Party, the buzz word is 'dialogue with militants'. The sentiment that rules is clearly that of 'Kashmir versus India'.

The NC's love-hate relationship with the Centre follows an all-too-familiar pattern these days. The more loyal and soft the party's stance is during non-election time, the more dour visage it wears during the elections. In fact, the anti-Centre jingle has remained a mainstay of National Conference's strength in the elections. 'Internal autonomy' and 'fight for Kashmir's honour and respect', both coined by the late Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah, still remain the party's oft-quoted slogans. But the party's image has taken a beating and the slogans do not ring as true as they used to.

The tactics was repeated when on 11 August, Farooq Abdullah, NC patriarch and chief minister, during a press conference in his office chambers in civil secretariate, bawled at the Centre for being 'apathetic' towards Jammu and Kashmir. "*Woh chahte hain ki hum hamesha bikhari rahein* (They want us to remain beggars for ever)," he said in high dudgeon, complaining that the Centre did not provide required financial assistance to the state. "But remember, if they don't help, I will go to Arab countries and ask them for help," he added. "*Yeh hum hain ki zahar ka piyal pe rahe hain. Allah jaane, hum bolein ge to sailaab aayega*," Abdullah grumbled, his face raging with emotions. The message seems to have caught on with the cadres and the refrain is heard everywhere now.

The National Conference has also

done away with its belligerence towards the separatist All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC). The Hurriyat amalgam, which has called for the boycott of elections, is, unlike last year, campaigning without any interruption. During last year's Parliamentary elections, the Farooq Abdullah government came down heavily on the APHC leaders and



OMAR ABDULLAH

Syed has fielded his daughter Mahbooba against the Abdullah family scion, Omar, in the Srinagar constituency. The contest now looks like a battle for upholding family prestige

prevented them from campaigning against elections. This enraged a large chunk of Hurriyat supporters who voted in favour of Opposition candidates. The NC circles believe that Mufti Mohammad Syed could not have won the Anantnag seat but for the Hurriyat's covert support.

Mufti's anti-Centre tirades and wooing of the militants is well-known. Now former Union minister Saifuddin Soz and CPI(M) leader Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami have also jumped onto the poll-time Centre-bashing bandwagon. Both also endorse the idea of opening a dialogue with the militants, eager as they are to win over the separatist vote bank. Soz is contesting as an Independent candidate from Baramullah seat while Tarigami is facing Mufti in Anantnag. However, the Soz-Tarigami duo are bitterly opposed to Mufti and the PDP. They label Mufti's slogan of dialogue as 'emotional blackmailing'. "Why didn't Mufti talk to militants when he was home minister in 1989-90?" they ask.

The All Party Hurriyat Conference which is spearheading a secessionist movement, is opposed to the very basic idea of polls in the Valley. The Hurriyat's stand is that elections are no answer to the people's right of self-determination. The multi-party conglomerate has launched a massive campaign across the length and breadth of the Valley against elections, calling people to abstain from exercising their franchise. Understandably, Hurriyat's campaign is based on anti-India sentiment. Hurriyat leaders are attracting crowds in greater numbers than pro-election leaders, so there is a chance that majority of the voters in the Valley might stay away from casting their votes.

The increase in militant activities is also adding up to the idea of a boycott. Al Badre Mujahideen, which came to be reckoned as a formidable militant group during the Kargil conflict, has declared elections as an 'anti-movement' enterprise. Those who would associate themselves with the process, they warn, will have to pay for it with death. Hurriyat, too, has called the pro-election parties and leaders as 'traitors'. Interestingly, none of the pro-election parties and persons has challenged Hurriyat openly. "They [contesting candidates] have an eye on Hurriyat's supporters," says a senior political analyst. "They cannot afford to annoy them." •

Rashid Ahmad/Srinagar

The singer, not the song

Praise is laid on thick for poet Vajpayee, but he says: main nahin makhan khao

First it was *Geet nahin gaata hun*. This was followed by *Na main chup hun, na gaata hun*. Then came *Geet naya gaata hun*.

Sounds a bit confusing, but this in a nutshell is Atal Behari Vajpayee, the poet.

And last week, the Prime Minister took time off from his hectic campaign tours to sit through a musical evening at Delhi's Siri Fort auditorium. In fact, he spent over an hour listening to Jagjit Singh, Alka Yagnik and Shankar Mahadevan. And from all accounts, he seemed to be having a wonderful time.

But if he had been bored, he would have had only himself to blame. For the songs that echoed through the hall were musical renditions of poems written by Vajpayee himself. Later, the Prime Minister released *Nayi Disha*, an album brought out by the R.P. Goenka group.

But first he had to hear eulogistic speeches about *Mananeev Kavi Atalji* (respected poet, Atalji) from the sponsors. In fact, Rama Prasad Goenka even managed the literary feat of comparing Vajpayee's works to Omar Khayyam. Another sponsor announced that he now wanted to make a film on 'Atalji'. While Shatrughan Sinha (who was sitting in the audience) beamed, the Prime Minister winced visibly.

There was more to come. Two gigantic screens on both sides of the stage came alive, and after a brief ad-break during which the RPG group promoted one of its cassettes of patriotic songs, the screen lit up with a video version of one of Vajpayee's poems — *Rote rote raat so gayee*. The first shot showed Vajpayee reading his book of poems; this dissolved into a sad-looking Ayesha Jhulka twirling a rose. Unfortunately, Vajpayee did not make another appearance in the video. Otherwise, it would have been interesting to see what he made out of Jhulka and the rose.

And finally, the audience got to hear what they'd come there for: vintage Vajpayee at his best. Carrying a piece of paper (which in all probability had the names of the music composers scribbled for him by a helpful aide), Vajpayee

approached the mike. Enthused by the moment, he made the sort of speech Delhi-ites had hoped him to deliver on 15 August.

Speaking extempore, he told the audience that he was from Gwalior. "*Aur Gwalior ke baare mein kaha jaata hai ki jab bachche bhi rote hain, to sur mein rote hain. Main to usur paida hua hun,*

And assured the audience that "*Main abhi aap ke saamne sahi-salamat khada hun.*" If this was his way of setting aside rumours about his health, then he couldn't have chosen a more quaint method of doing so.

While he quoted liberally from most of his poems, he failed to mention the most famous one of them all: *Jung na*



A.B. Vajpayee makes a speech at the cassette release function: crowd-puller

aur sasur banne ka bhi mauka nahin mila," he said, with a mischievous smile. The joke was not lost on an audience which had seen Vajpayee arriving at the venue accompanied by his foster family.

He then went on to explain that one of the songs that was sung — *Maut se than gayee* (when I came face-to-face with death) was written at a time when he was very ill and had to have an operation the next day. "I did not know what will happen the next day," he recalled, "and at that point it did seem as if *maut jindagi se badhi ho gayi*. But that is not true. Death can never be larger than life," he said.

hone doonga. That one has now become a casualty of the Kargil war.

But clearly, this was an evening that was marked for Vajpayee the poet. There was only one reference to him as the Prime Minister — the Election Commission would certainly have approved. And at the end of it all, when an usherer presented Vajpayee with a bouquet of flowers, someone in the audience sighed, "*Vo ladki kitni lucky hai* (That girl is so lucky)."

Was that one for Vajpayee the poet, or Vajpayee the Prime Minister? •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

Charisma Counts

Atal Behari Vajpayee is the BJP's best vote-catcher

On the afternoon of 9 August, squabbling BJP bosses in Uttar Pradesh were a worried lot. Lucknow is Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's home constituency, yet not many had turned up to hear him speak. It wasn't a good sign, because in the murky, rough-and-tumble politics of the day, Vajpayee is still the BJP's prime vote-catcher. It was time to wake up and, for the moment at least, forget petty rivalry.

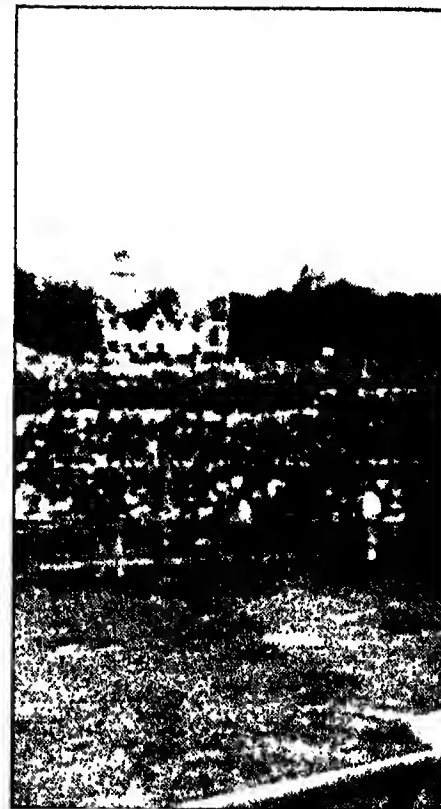
The Lucknow flop acted as the tonic. Eight days later, on Tuesday, 17 August, it was an entirely different scene at Varanasi. When Vajpayee ascended the dais erected inside the sprawling playground of Kashi Vidyapeeth, one of the country's oldest universities, the 70-80,000 crowd responded with a standing ovation. Then burst into rhapsodic applause with cries of "Jai Shree Ram" and "Har-Har Mahadev" when he spoke on the success in Kargil. Emotion was in abundance that day.

From the point of view of electoral speculation, Varanasi, a key representative constituency of Eastern UP, is an important mood indicator. A successful rally here would mean that the signs are positive. Unfortunately for the BJP, the calculation this time isn't so simple. Because, in spite of the roaring response this time it's somewhat uncertain for Vajpayee and his men. Even the neighbouring Mirzapur-Bhadohi parliamentary constituency doesn't reflect the pro-BJP mood that was still visible last time.

So what could have upset this facile rhythm?

At a more immediate level, it's the entry of two very strong contenders that the Congress has fielded, both Brahmins. One is Rajesh Misra, a popular BHU student leader and currently a member of the Legislative Council from the Graduate's constituency, who squares off against sitting BJP MP Shankar Prasad Jaiswal in Varanasi. And two, the septuagenarian Congress veteran, Shyamdhara Misra, who takes on Veerendra Singh in Mirzapur-Bhadohi.

For some time now, a large section of Brahmins — the dominant community in the region — have not exactly liked the BJP's preference for non-Brahmins — a *baniya* and a *thakur* — in these two seats for consecutive terms. In UP's volatile politics, the right caste can swing the right number of votes, and Congress



Vajpayee addressing the crowd in Varanasi

election managers must also have realised that the Brahmins haven't yet been reconciled to the fact that chief minister Kalyan Singh is an OBC.

To be fair to Rajesh and Shyamdhara Misra, both have established credentials. If Shyamdhara Misra comes across as a seasoned Congress activist, the young

ALL FOR VAJPAYEE Voices from the streets of Varanasi and Mirzapur

■ I don't know Jaiswal, neither am I any fan of the BJP. But to make Atal Behari Vajpayee the country's Prime Minister, I'll vote for the BJP candidate — *Shyam (a rickshaw-puller)*

■ I don't know what to do. I want to teach Veerendra Singh a lesson, but I want Vajpayee to win too — *A carpet-yarn dealer*

■ Jaiswal is like any other MP who forgets the voters once elections are over. But my vote will go to Atalji, so I will vote for Jaiswal — *Vikram (a waiter in a restaurant)*

■ There's no denying that Jaiswal has failed to live up to expectations. Nothing's been done to develop the city. But right now we are quiet because the larger goal before us is to see Atalji back in the saddle — *A party worker*



What holds the average voter back from casting his vote in favour of the Congress is the presence of Vajpayee

student leader is a man with a wide appeal among social activists, lawyers, teachers and intellectuals. UP watchers, however, say his biggest asset is the virtual en bloc support of Muslims who make up over 12 per cent of the electorate.

The tilt is best summed up by Sami Ullah, an advocate in the Varanasi district courts. "There is much disillusionment with Mulayam Singh Yadav," he says. "Even that small section of Muslims, who would still prefer him, have no choice because Mulayam has left the Varanasi seat for Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party." Apparently, it has also got a lot to do with the enigmatic Congress chief. "Sonia Gandhi," he says, "has recast the image of the Congress and Muslims realise that their future lies only with the Congress. After all, what did Mulayam do for Muslims in the years that he was in power?"

A more candidate-specific logic comes from Ajay Prakash Srivastava, president of Varanasi's Central Bar Associa-

tion. "Rajesh Misra," he says, "stands out unlike Jaiswal who remains holed up in his ivory tower. Misra is easily accessible. Even though he's an MLC, he has been devoting much of his constituency fund here. No one knows what Jaiswal has done with his one-crore-rupee constituency fund—at least, it's not visible anywhere in this neglected city." Social activist Anupam Prakash Verma agrees. "The support for Rajesh Misra cuts across caste lines. He is respected for his sincerity and commitment."

The anti-Jaiswal talk spills over on to the streets. And it isn't tough finding out that Varanasi's common voter doesn't recognise him, even though he has been the sitting MP for the past two terms. "I don't know Jaiswal, neither am I any fan of the BJP," says Shyamu, a rickshaw-puller. Fortunately for the BJP, the disenchantment stops there. If anything, men on the street like Shyamu will vote for the BJP because of Vajpayee. As he says, "I will vote for the BJP candidate to make Vajpayee the

country's Prime Minister." Another voter, Vikram, a waiter in a restaurant, too, mouths no praise for the sitting MP who, he says, is like any other MP who "forgets the voters once elections are over". But again, it's the same sentimental refrain: "My vote will go to Atalji, so I will vote for Jaiswal."

Even die-hard BJP loyalists don't see Jaiswal as a capable candidate. "There's no denying that he has failed to live up to expectations. Nothing has been done to develop the city. But right now we are quiet because the larger goal before us is to see Atalji back in the saddle," says a local party worker.

How irrelevant Jaiswal is became clear when none of the key speakers at Vajpayee's rally, including Kalyan Singh and state unit chief Raj Nath Singh, cared to introduce him. Nor was he given a chance to speak. It was only towards the end of his speech that Vajpayee made a passing reference. "You've seen what we all have done over the past 13 months. It is to complete the unfinished task that I have come here to knock at your doors and seek your support for Shankar Prasad Jaiswal," he told

the crowd.

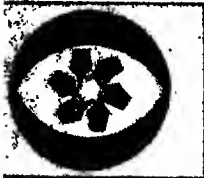
In Mirzapur-Bhadohi, BJP incumbent Veerendra Singh is also no better than Jaiswal when it comes to development issues. Once again, it's the same we'll-vote-for-Vajpayee refrain. As a candidate, Veerendra Singh evokes no response. But what probably holds the voter back from casting his vote in favour of the Congress this time is Vajpayee's charisma. "I don't know what to do," confesses a carpet yarn dealer "I want to teach Veerendra Singh a lesson, but I want Vajpayee to win too."

It's easy to see the extent of the discontent. But still, people like Ajit Kumar, a known social activist, are convinced that people would vote in the name of Vajpayee. But it's also true that both Jaiswal and Veerendra Singh, who had romped home with hefty margins in 1998, are no more confident enough to say with certainty that they'd win again. If they at all manage to scrape through, it will be only because of their charismatic leader. •

Sharat Pradhan/Varanasi

V. GANGADHAR

Why should the rot in the country's political system affect the media as well?



In my time I had covered politicians, political parties and also half a dozen general elections. Occasionally, it was taxing but mentally refreshing. I

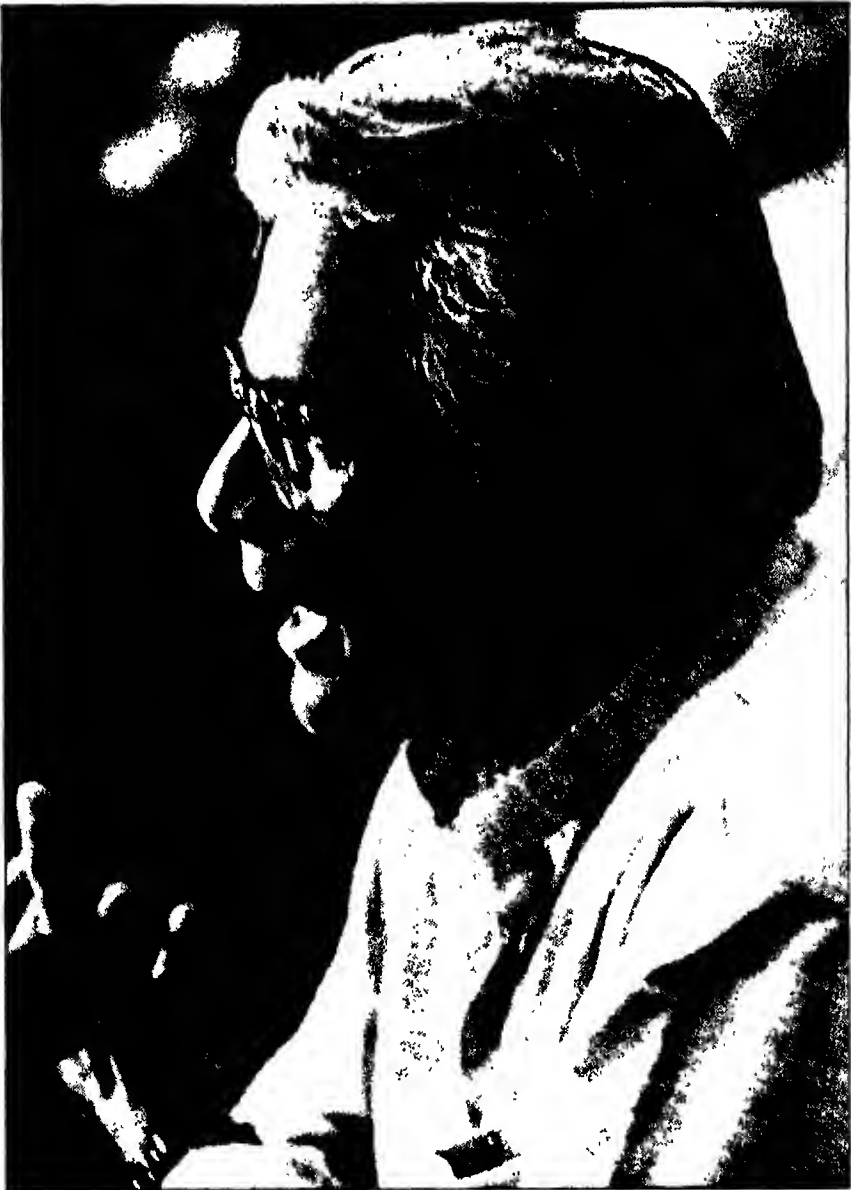
saw Indian democracy at work. Candidates had something to tell the electorate, there was still some faith in ideology, decency and fair play.

Today, 52 years after achieving Independence, we have to go through yet another poll process. I am now depressed. I also pity the journalists who will be covering the Lok Sabha and some state Assembly elections. What can they write about? What will be their focus? Treachery, stabbings in the back, political skulduggery, the worst kind of opportunism?

The electoral alliances, which are changing every day, take my breath away. For several decades, the North and Brahmin-dominated Jana Sangh (now Bharatiya Janata Party) was an untouchable to the Dravidian parties which had ruled Tamil Nadu since 1967. The DK, DMK and the AIADMK along with their offshoots had prided themselves on their anti-Brahminism, anti-North Indianism and anti-Hindi emotions.

Today, the entire scenario had changed. Jayalalitha and her AIADMK allied with the BJP, and now it is the turn of the DMK. How did Kalaingar Karunanidhi and his followers suddenly discover noble qualities in Vajpayee, Advani and Co.? Has Hindi become as sweet as *Chentamuzh mozhi* (pure Tamil)? Perhaps, it is a question of survival but aren't there any principles left in political alliances?

Or take the case of George Fernandes. A political chameleon, if there was one, he finally came 'home' to roost with the BJP. But for the BJP support, his Samata Party would have floundered. Soon he became the trusted troubleshooter of Vajpayee who used him to negotiate and settle with the demands of the allies. George, at times, appeared to be more



George Fernandes: his seeking out old friends in the JD was inexcusable

Partial views

important than even the Prime Minister. Yet the same Fernandes had the gall to turn his back on the BJP, seek out his old friends in the Janata Dal and demand that they be recognised and allied with the BJP. The ruling party resurrected George's flagging political career and this was what it got in return.

George's political somersaults are well-known but the strange go-back to the JD was something inexcusable. Mind you, the JD stalwarts had branded BJP communal and voted out the BJP government in Parliament. I am not commenting on George's non-performance as the defence minister, that is another issue. But for political perfidy, the George act was unique.

We have another character in Tamil Nadu politics, Vaiko who refused to snap his links with the dreaded LTTE which was responsible for the assassination of an Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. Recently, a wedding in the Vaiko family was attended by quite a few LTTE bigwigs. Among those present was the home minister L.K. Advani. The media is full of photographs and patriotic statements from Vaiko who, in normal course of events, should be under investigation for his LTTE links.

And now the issue of corruption. Don't make me laugh. Sukh Ram from Himachal Pradesh whose home rained Rs 100 currency bundles is now an honoured ally of the BJP. Every wish of his is being obeyed. This is the party which is supposed to be 'clean' and screams about punishing those responsible for the Bofors scam! Such attitudes are seldom commented upon in the media.

X belongs to a political party which denies him a Lok Sabha or state Assembly election ticket. Immediately, along with his followers, he joins a rival party on which he had been showering abuses for several years. A single act of non-receipt of a ticket brings about such a transformation. He immediately holds a press conference, blasts his former party and lavishes praise on his present one. The media seldom raises inconvenient questions on political integrity.

I am not writing a political thesis. But most sections of the media are so biased one way or the other that their voices get muted when commenting on these issues. Political reporters these days openly take sides. Take the case of *The*

Pioneer, a splendid, objective paper during the Vinod Mehta days, now reduced to the status of a saffron rag. Perhaps, it is due to the pressures from the present management about which the less said the better. Recently *The Pioneer* had a clear below-the-belt editorial based on a small report about Rahul Gandhi giving up his UK job to help his mother Sonia Gandhi during the polls.

Normally edits are written on important topics, but to *The Pioneer*, the likely happening of Rahul helping his mother was enough to produce a vitriolic attack. The editor should pay more attention to the conspiracies hatched in the home of the Prime Minister's foster son-in-law.

Read the puff pieces on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. He is supposed to have saved India from the Pak infiltrators. Have we forgotten the basic fact that this government was conveniently sleeping when the infiltration was going on merrily? We did not conquer any

fresh territory. With great difficulty and at the cost of valuable lives, we only got back our territories where the enemy had established control. This was not bravery on the part of the government. Credit should be given to the armed forces, particularly in view of their being under the control of a maverick defence minister who was politicking in Chennai and presiding over the 'glorious' anniversary of the 1974 railway strike when the infiltration was first reported. Yet, according to magazines like *India Today*, there is no alternative to the BJP. How biased can our political coverages get? For how many more issues will *India Today* put Vajpayee on the cover?

We all agree that there is a rot in the country's political system. But why should the rot affect the media? The



Have we forgotten that this government was conveniently sleeping when the infiltration was on? Yet, according to *India Today*, there is no alternative to the BJP

media has to come out with stronger attacks on political corruption, defection and projecting pseudo-patriotism as practised by the likes of Sushma Swaraj. Does wearing a tri-colour saree make one more patriotic? Yes, according to Sushma Swaraj. Unfortunately, sections of the media go along with these silly views. I hope that in the days to come, the media will blast Sonia Gandhi not for her Italian roots, but for leading everyone in a merry chase before filing her nomination papers from Bellary. A leader of her stature who has ambitions to rule the country should be prepared to contest from any constituency and face any political opponent. What was the need to play hide-and-seek on this issue and get outwitted by the BJP? •

Soccer Inc.

The Calcutta football league is all set to go totally professional

While the All India Football Federation is still years away from a totally professional set-up, its Bengal affiliate, Indian Football Association, is moving towards a pragmatic switch a year after the new millennium commences.

IFA secretary Ranjit Gupta has had

Goa took the lead in introducing professional soccer in India. It was relatively easy there because from the start various companies evinced interest in sponsoring the clubs. Churchill is the exception, the two football crazy politician brothers keeping their team going with personal funds.

However, the Goan league isn't a big-budget affair. The IFA, running a semi-professional super division league, provides almost Rs 50 lakh in prize money and participation fees every year. This is possible because ESPN has been sponsoring the IFA's league and knockout competitions over the past few years.

But ESPN has not been getting the mileage it deserved because there are restrictions on live coverage of matches without which advertisers remain cold. This is where Mallya felt IFA should "make things happen". He suggested that telecast rights should be given to the highest bidder, so that revenue starts flowing in.

UB's contention is that there should be scope for clubs to earn money. Funds could be garnered through a percentage from gate receipts and the sale of club memorabilia. Matches should be held after office hours so that a larger number of spectators could be present. And live coverage will go a long way in popularising the sport.

The IFA has set up a committee to work out the modalities of a six to eight team professional league. "We want to have a league which will provide both teams and players to the national league, if and when it becomes professional," says Gupta.

"There is no reason why the game cannot be marketed here. After all, this is the most popular sport, both among players and sports fans," says the IFA secretary.

But however pious the intention, true professionalism cannot come about until most professional clubs have their own practice and playing grounds, hostels, gymnasias and libraries. In Calcutta, as in other parts of India, clubs depend on either the government or the army for playing fields. They don't have the infrastructure for a professional club, although East Bengal has taken giant strides in this direction. It has a good gym and will soon start a junior training school.

However, what is needed is rethinking on the part of all clubs. Without their own infrastructure, they can never become professional. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta



Vijay Mallya: millennial move

preliminary discussions with Vijay Mallya for a limited professional debut. The UB group chairman has evinced interest in a league that would feature limited companies in place of social clubs. As the head of Calcutta's three leading clubs, Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting, he is keen to see a professional league get under way as soon as possible.

"But this does not mean we can immediately get into this," said Ranjit Gupta. "It is now at the negotiation stage and a lot of areas still have to be covered to get things in place."

UB group chairman Vijay Mallya, as the head of Calcutta's three leading clubs, Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting, is keen to see a professional league get under way as soon as possible

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Poison potion

Assam's Karbi Anglong district is hit by crippling fluoride contamination

A tragedy is just beginning to unfold in Karbi Anglong, one of Assam's most picturesque districts. The tribal inhabitants of this forest-clad mountain terrain are slowly drinking themselves to near death, and the toxic ale is none other than plain water.

Studies in five Karbi villages by the School of Environmental Studies (SOES), Jadavpur University, Calcutta, have revealed alarming levels of fluoride in the water people drink. And what makes the situation all the more poignant is that the severely contaminated water is supplied by five waterworks run by the state Public Health Engineering Department (PHED). Water samples from these PHED schemes have shown fluoride contents dangerously above the permissible limit.

While the threshold level for fluoride in drinking water is said to be 1.5 mg/litre, samples tested by SOES were found to have fluoride contents ranging from 1.58 mg/litre to 15.40 mg/litre. Prolonged consumption of water with such high fluoride values badly damages teeth and the body's bone structure with crippling effect.

The SOES carried out studies in five Karbi villages and two villages in the adjoining Nagaon district. In all seven, the investigating team ran into people suffering from dental and skeletal fluorosis.

Out of the 305 people examined in the five Karbi Anglong villages, 144 or 47.2 per cent were found to be suffering from dental fluorosis and 27 showed symptoms of skeletal fluorosis. The water they drink was found to have a high concentration of fluoride (between 8 and 15 mg/litre).

Borsing Kiling, 31, a resident of Napak Kiling village, was found to be severely affected. He cannot move his body or stretch his legs and suffers from acute dental deformities. For ten years, he has been drinking water having a fluoride content as high as 14.36 mg/litre.



MAINED BY WATER: A girl with acute dental fluorosis and a disabled Borsing Kiling

The total population of the five Karbi villages was estimated to be 2,000. It is likely, therefore, that more extensive surveys would lead to the detection of more fluorosis patients. The SOES analysed water samples from 19 hand pumps in the five villages, and 13 out of them (68.4 per cent) were found to have fluoride between 8 and 15 mg/litre.

The problem came to light when Assam PHED's additional chief engineer A.B. Pal, recently posted in Diphu, the district headquarters, initiated an investigation into the quality of water supplied by his department. He was prompted to take this step by a high incidence of dental and skeletal deformities among the people. A preliminary test of 121 water samples revealed that nearly 70 per cent had fluoride way above the permissible limit.

For further confirmation, Pal sent water samples to the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health in Calcutta. And again the samples tested dangerously positive. Pal then approached the SOES for a deeper probe, and the school came back with worrisome data.

SOES director Dr Dipankar Chakraborti says that many of the patients had reported that they were suffering for nearly 20 years. Yet, no one — neither government doctors nor PHED officers — had ever thought of probing the cause of the deformities.

More surprising is the fact that the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission had said in a 1994 report that fluoride contamination of drinking water had not "yet" been detected in any of the north-eastern states. It is now clear that even at the time when the report was being drafted and finalised, fluoride was slow-poisoning the people of Karbi Anglong.

Chakraborti fears that groundwater in the adjoining districts having the same geological features as that of Karbi Anglong could also be contaminated. According to UNICEF estimates, 25 million people in India are affected by fluorosis. Now, with Karbi Anglong entering the list of affected regions, that number will only rise. •

Anish Gupta/Calcutta



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What Rani Mukherjee needs more than anything in the world is a good dietician. The woman seems to be piling on the pounds as if she were in competition with Guddi Maruti.

See her dancing with Aamir Khan in *Mann*, and it looks as if her biceps are bigger than his. Watch her frolicking with Ajay Devgan, and she seems the far better bodybuilder.

If this woman doesn't go on a diet-and-exercise regimen — and fast — she will soon be playing the comedienne rather than heroine in her next movies.



AISHWARYA RAI

RAKESH SHRESTH

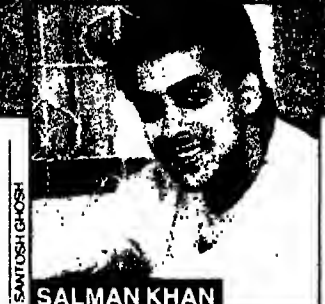
RAKESH SHRESTH

If rumour is to be believed, there is trouble on the *Mann* set. A Koirala-Whose? (who indeed?) front. The two love birds have been having adjustment problems of late, and stormy nights have become a regular occurrence. Manisha's way of coping with this problem is to stuff her face — presumably to fill the aching hollow within her — and the result is fairly predictable. Weight gain of the kind that would make even Mahesh Bhatt blush. Needless to add, Koirala's producers are less than delighted at this development, and are praying that her love life shapes up soon — after all, that's the only way her own shape will improve as well.

MANISHA KOIRALA

It looks as if the Salman Khan-Aishwarya Rai affair is finally off. Apparently,

Ms Rai's fond parents put their foot down and told their daughter in no uncertain terms that she should have nothing further to do with Khan. Mrs and Mr Rai, evidently, were not too enamoured of the kind of reputation that Salman has earned over the years.



SALMAN KHAN

SANTOSH GUPTA

The latest is that Aishwarya has given in to their entreaties and has told Salman that marriage — or even a romantic association — is quite out of the question. Whether Khan will admit defeat quite so easily is quite another matter, of course.



SUSHMITA SEN

Sushmita Sen's career is taking off just when her love life is at a sorry pass. First, her live-in relationship with Vikram Bhatt came to a sorry end. Then, her location romance with Sanjay Kapoor was nipped in the bud when Kapoor flew back to marry long-time girlfriend, Maheep.

But just when all seemed to be lost for Sen, her luck began looking up. And now with twin hits in a row, she looks all set for the big time. She may be flying solo, but as long as she's flying high, who cares?

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All his films have won national awards, but Asukh is the closest to Rituparno Ghosh's heart

Prized Pos

Is Rituparno Ghosh the man who likes strutting his stuff (designer black dhoti, *ikkat*-dyed *odhni*, an embroidered cap and a sing-song accent) when he takes centre stage at a filmi bash as the master of ceremonies — an ex-officio job for the editor of Calcutta's premier film magazine? Or is he the person assiduously pouring over piles of archival material on a tired and sweltering afternoon at Visva Bharati, when the mercury touches an all-time high, to find out more about the background of his next film *Chokher Bali*, based on a book by Rabindranath Tagore? Or is he the jet-setter who goes round the world with his films, picking up prizes and accolades on the way but coming back to his home in south Calcutta, to his proud parents who don't hesitate to give him a piece of their mind when they feel like it and to his production unit

who systematically bully him into bringing out his best? Which one of these is he?

Friends from Response, the ad agency he worked in for a decade, remember him as the scruffy-looking, sloppily-dressed Bengali copywriter 'with an attitude problem' — a far cry from the celebrity film-maker who has made winning national awards a habit (he won three for all three of his films released so far). "But I had also won 17 advertising awards before that," says Rituparno, recalling the days when he was still a nobody. He had begun to feel claustrophobic at the workplace and the artist inside him was crying out loud to find expression. But there were also things which advertising taught him — "important things like: the individual does not get any credit for producing a campaign". Similarly, to Rituparno, film-making is team work, the product of the efforts put in by

each member in the unit. "I resent the tag 'a film by Rituparno Ghosh'. My name appears in the credit list in the same point size as the rest."

Rituparno seems to have an uncanny knack for going deep down the inner recesses of women's minds. Although he resents any kind of gender branding, insisting that his films are about human beings and that their being women is only incidental; he seems to have a gift for understanding the woman's psyche, her position in society, even the darkness within. It comes out of a deep empathy with the woman's cause. *Unishe April* (19 April) is about the resolution of a tragic misunderstanding between a middle-aged danseuse, widowed for over 18 years, and her grown up daughter who dotes on her dead father and resents her mother for having a career and taking a boyfriend. In *Dahan* (Crossfire), based on a real-life incident,

"I resent the tag 'a film by Rituparno Ghosh'. My name appears in the credit list in the same point size as the rest"



Session

a young school-teacher saves another young woman from getting molested by a bunch of hoodlums. But when it comes to identifying the criminals, it's the victim who backs out under pressure. In *Asukh* (Malaise), which releases this week, the protagonist, a film star, helplessly watches her world crumbling around her (her boyfriend has his eye



ASUKH: a star daughter's relationship with her ordinary father



on a young starlet, her mother could be suffering from AIDS); and coils further inside her cocoon of celebrity.

It's not just his choice of women-oriented themes, he seems to have a rare feel of the female sensitivity. In *Dahan*, Romita, having been through the ordeal of attempted rape on the street, gets raped by her husband in her own bed and then ultimately submits to him because he's the one she still loves and is reconciled to the idea of spending the rest of her life with. The scene of marital rape comes to us filtered through the mosquito net. Was it a concession to the delicate middle-class sensibility or his own aesthetic sense? "It would have been too voyeuristic otherwise," says Rituparno. "If the camera is taken inside the mosquito net, I would lose out on the film-maker's objectivity. It was very important for me to bring out the contrast bet-

ween Romita's getting molested on the road, in a public place and being raped by her husband in her own bed which looks soft and sheltered."

The perennial inspirations in his life are Rabindranath Tagore, Satyajit Ray and Aparna Sen—in a sense all products of an Indo-European culture via the 19th Century Bengal Renaissance, rich in traditional values yet very, very contemporary. And very androgynous in their creative approach as well. If Tagore is the deity presiding over his creative endeavours, ("He is a character in *Asukh*, well, almost"); Ray is the guru he never met and Sen, of course, is the woman she grew up with in his life as a film-maker. For Rituparno, 'Rinadi' (Sen) is godmother, mentor and friend all rolled into one, with whom he shares a sibling-like relationship. In fact, Sen

was instrumental in getting him his first break. After NFDC rejected *Unishe April*, Sen co-produced it with Renu Roy of Spandan. The film went on to win the Best Feature Award in 1995 and Debasree Roy who played the lead was the year's Best Actress.

Debasree, with who Rituparno had a slight misunderstanding after he called her a 'director's actress' ("But there wasn't any negative aspersion in it. As Shabana Azmi says, it's a very rare quality to be able to surrender to a director"), has returned to play the lead in *Asukh*. In her isolation as a celebrity, her intense and hyper-sensitive reaction to the crises in her life, her closeness with her loving parents which sometimes gets to her and her search for identity with Rabindranath Tagore as the guiding light, Rohini is much like Rituparno, the man whose brainchild she is. She is rich, young, beautiful and a celebrity and yet her life is fraught with the same old middle-class problems, which can't be wished away. It's a world Rituparno obviously knows too well. "My most mature work to date," he says, lovingly, of the film.

Rituparno has already used the format of cinema within cinema twice, in *Badiwali* (Landlady), a film with Kiron Kher in the lead, now in its finishing stages, and again in *52 Episodes*, a teleserial. Is it the mechanism of film-making that fascinates him? "It's the enormous human drama that takes place behind every film that gets made," says the director. The creative people in his film are often selfish, narrow-minded, pragmatic mercenaries. In *Badiwali*, the film director who is shooting in an old mansion seems warm and friendly towards the middle-aged landlady, a single woman who is delighted with all the attention. But her euphoria is short-lived. The film unit will have nothing to do with her once they move out of the house. The irony is that "film-makers are supposed to be sensitive. In this film they become professionals more than human beings. It is the product that becomes more important than all else."

So, which is the real Rituparno? The feminist, the Tagorite, a turn-of-the-century film-maker with a firm belief in traditional human values? Rituparno himself would laugh such a question off. For he does not believe in taking himself or his work too seriously. Nor does he believe in labels. To him, it is the joy of making a film that matters. •

Chitralekha Basu/Calcutta

UNDER ATTACK *file picture of army personnel in Kargil*

J A M M U & K A S H M I R

Back to the front

Militants in Kashmir take up fresh positions

On 4 July, when Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif asked militants to pull back from Kargil, Hizbul Mujahideen supremo Syed Salahuddin resented the Pak premier's imposition as "betrayal" and "back-stabbing". Salahuddin, who heads the Muzaffarabad-based 14-party militant alliance of United Jihad Council, declared that militants would not pull out but would, instead, change their positions. He spoke of a new Kargil, rather many more Kargils, if India continued with what he called its "intransigence" and "stubbornness" on the Kashmir issue.

And the militants started executing their plans without delay. The first major post-Kargil offensive took place on 13 July, when militants entered the residential quarters of the BSF's sector headquarters at Bandipora and gunned down a DIG, a deputy commandant and a sub-inspector in the dead of night. This was for the first time in the history of militancy in Kashmir that the militants embarked upon a suicidal mission. The incident set a new trend and almost all the militant groups vowed to repeat Bandipora in every nook and corner of the state. Lashkar-e-Toiba — which claimed responsibility for

storming the BSF headquarters — announced that it had formed *fidai* groups (suicide squads) to take the fight against security forces into their camps.

The daredevil action was repeated on the night of 5 August when a group of Hizbul Mujahideen cadres attacked the camp of 4 Rashtriya Rifles (RR) in Kupwara district. The offensive left five soldiers, including the camp commander captain Mandeep Singh, dead and several wounded. The very next day, Hizb activists ambushed RR commanding officer Colonel Balbir Singh, killing him along with his driver and two other *jawans* at Keegam, 2 km away from Natnusa. The same evening, militants fired rockets and missiles on the army's brigade headquarters at Trehgam, in the same area, killing one *jawan* and injuring four others. This was the first time that Trehgam brigade headquarters came under attack from militants.

The offensive reveals a change of strategy. Senior police and civilian authorities admit that the conventional guerrilla "hit-and-run" manoeuvring has been replaced by the unusual method of taking the fight inside security forces' camps. "Earlier, they used to fire from a distance," says Maj.Gen. R.K. Kaushal, GOC of counter-insurgency force of Rashtriya

Rifles. "Now they fire from close positions."

A commonly-held belief is that militants now fight with more dedication. The reason for this may be that groups now comprise mostly of foreigners who are highly trained and equipped with sophisticated weapons. These militants coming from Pakistan, Afghanistan and other Muslim countries display radical religious orientation. "They have been taught that they were fighting a *jihad* (holy war) and he who died here would be bestowed with the blessings of Allah," says a police officer.

Police and intelligence sources believe that more than 1,000 foreign militants have infiltrated into Kupwara, Rajouri and Poonch forests in the past two months. Local residents admit strong presence of militants in Ramhal, Hafrida, Wayoosa, Lolab and Zachaldar forests. "They come down to the villages to buy commodities more often," said one villager in Rafiabad. In fact, security forces ambushed seven Hizbul Mujahideen boys on 7 August when they came down to the plains.

The unprecedented militant activity in Kupwara has given rise to the speculation that another Kargil is in the offing. It has been reported that vast areas in the district have already



A WORRIED MAN: chief minister Farooq Abdullah

been taken over by the militants. And these reports were confirmed by BSF inspector-general A.S. Mangat who commands the force in most parts of north Kashmir. On 7 August, Mangat disclosed that around 1,200 heavily-armed militants were occupying positions on the high ridges along the line of control (LoC) in Kupwara and Baraniullah districts.

The Kargil episode has reportedly rejuvenated the militants notwithstanding the fact that they had to pull back without any substantial military gains. The two-month-long conflict seems to have come as a boost to their confidence. "It has given them a feeling that more risks they take, more attention they would attract," points out a senior political analyst.

Kargil has also seemed to have generated militant feelings among the local youth. Nearly 500 young boys have reportedly gone over to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) for arms-training. Army authorities have handed over six boys to their

parents on 5 August. These boys were part of a group of 18 who were being taken to PoK. Local Urdu dailies occasionally carry advertisements about missing young boys. Intelligence agencies believe that most of these missing boys have joined the militant ranks.

Incidentally, militants have not kept themselves restricted to Kupwara alone. A vehicle belonging to two marine commandos was blown up in an IED explosion at Bandipora on 12 August. Two army men got killed in a sneak attack on a camp at Beerwah, in central Kashmir. Under the new strategy, police stations and pro-government militants, known as *Ikhwamis*, are other targets. In the past three weeks, at least seven police stations and *Ikhwani* camps have come under attack.

The surge in militancy has got the authorities worried. Chief minister Farooq Abdullah has described the Kupwara situation as "terribly shocking". But even the CM could not explain as to how militants could sneak in when "there were 58-60 battalions of army manning the borders". "This needs to be probed," Abdullah recently told newsmen.

Rashid Ahmad/Srinagar

BIHAR

Divine intervention

The archbishop of Chhotanagpur decides to go with the Congress

He is supposed to be engrossed with matters divine. But the archbishop of the Chhotanagpur region seems to have a penchant for politics. And he also seems to be one who can make or break the career of quite a few who are in the poll fray.

With his tilt towards the Congress, the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Mission in the Chhotanagpur region, Father Telesphor Toppo, is a busy man receiving long-distance calls and meeting prospective Congress candidates. Visitors who call on him now include khadi-clad *netas* trying to curry divine favours. Though how many of them will eventually receive Father Toppo's blessings is not clear.

Talking to SUNDAY, Father Toppo pointed out that though there was no dearth of aspirants coming to seek his blessings before the elections, he had his limitations to extend physical support. He confided that he could neither afford to issue *fatwa* on his community for casting their votes nor could he give them the go ahead to elect an undeserving candidate. The archbishop said at best he could persuade his people not to waste their votes.

Toppo, however, did not mince words in lashing out at the poor performance of the Vajpayee-led government at the Centre. He felt that there was a need for a change of guard at the Centre as well in the Jharkhand region. Toppo explained that it was because of wranglings within different non-BJP political parties that 12 out of the 14 parliamentary seats from this tribal region were in the possession of the BJP.

To prove his point, Toppo said that though there were 4 lakh Christian voters in the Khunti constituency, the seat was held by the BJP simply because the votes were divided among different pro-Jharkhand-non-BJP political parties. He called

upon the pro-Jharkhand parties to bury their differences and put up a joint front under the Congress in the larger interest of the long-drawn struggle for a separate Jharkhand State.

A staunch supporter of Jharkhand, Father Toppo said that political parties were playing a gambit in the name of granting a separate statehood to this region. In fact, he was not even willing to compromise on the name of the proposed state. He had raised a stiff opposition when the BJP government at the Centre wanted to grant separate status to this region by naming it Vananchal instead of Jharkhand. He had also written a strongly-worded letter to the Prime Minister registering his protest.

Toppo pointed out that even an ally like the Samata Party was not happy with the role played by the BJP in the Jharkhand region. Supposed to be a close associate of defence minister George Fernandes, Father Toppo said that during his last meeting with Fernandes in Ranchi, the issue of anti-Christian attitude of the BJP was discussed.

Despite being a diehard Congress supporter, Father Toppo had no hesitation in suggesting that Sonia Gandhi should not aspire for the post of India's Prime Minister. He felt that it would spark off controversy across the country, something which the Congress can do without at the moment. •

D.P. Sharan/Ranchi

ENVIRONMENT

Business unusual

A CMDA study reveals interesting facts about Calcutta's industries

The incident hardly found a place in newspaper columns. A couple of weeks back, residents of Calcutta's north-eastern suburb of Lake Town complained of an 'irritating, choking odour' coming out from a chemical factory. The office of the state Pollution Control Board (PCB) received panic calls. Officers swung into action and working in tandem with the district administration, they soon brought the situation under control. The leak was 'minor'.

In Calcutta, the number of such incidents seems to be on the rise. The figures for the past year are too high for comfort. Starting with the Dasnagar tragedy in neighbouring Howrah, a number of mishaps involving local industrial units have taken place which include a fire in a Beliaghata paint factory, an accident in a bulb factory in Lake Town and a fire in a plastic factory at Dhapa. And the list goes on. According to an official estimate, there are around 25,000 industrial units which operate within the greater Calcutta area. Most of these units are located bang in the middle of residential areas and many are not even registered with the industry department.

Keeping this in mind, the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) recently carried out a pilot project to get an idea of the status of industries within the city precincts. The project, called 'Identification and Mapping of Industries within CMA Area', was initiated in June 1998 to cover four wards in north and central Calcutta. The state environment department provided the Rs 4.5 lakh while CMDA's environment and socio-economic cells carried out the work with sup-

PABITRA DAS



CLEAN-UP TIME: a polluting industrial unit

port from WBPCB and the directorate of cottage and small-scale industries. The interim report has been submitted while the final report is being given shape.

Some of the findings are interesting. According to Tapas Ghatak of CMDA's environment cell, north Calcutta was chosen because a large number of units were located here. The central Calcutta was chosen keeping in mind the congestion factor. The idea was to generate a database of more than a hundred parameters — location, annual turnover, products, raw material, solid and liquid waste generated and their disposal etc. — for each unit. Data on these parameters were collected through a questionnaire.

Out of nearly 2,000 industries covered by the pilot project,

Long haul

A large quantity of explosives is recovered in Calcutta

It was the morning of 16 August. Though the initial rush was over, Sealdah station, located in the heart of Calcutta city, was bustling with commuters. Anath Bandhu Biswas and Radheshyam Pande were two undercover men from Special Branch doing their routine beat on the platforms.

By the time the duo ambled on to Platform No. 8, it was 11.55 am and Jammu-Tawi Express had departed barely ten minutes ago. The men spotted two boxes covered with blue-coloured waterproof sheets. The boxes were lying under the board where the reservation chart is put up before departure of trains from the platform.

The men also saw some leads of wires and batteries sticking out of the boxes. An alarm was raised and the platform — which handles VIP movements — was cordoned off. The cops arrived and when they opened the package, it revealed a large cache of a blackish-blue coloured paste along with sealed batteries, detonators, two chargers and wires to connect the explosives with detonators.

Panic gripped the station as bomb squad personnel descended on the scene, with sniffer dogs at their heels. This was the largest haul of explosives in the city in recent years.

40 per cent were found to be in the 'red', ten per cent in 'orange' and the rest in 'green' categories. An earlier study by the state government on similar lines had observed that there was "not a single ward in the CMC [Calcutta Municipal Corporation] area that is entirely free from the risk of industrial emission and waste disposal...few areas are particularly bad and require a detailed investigation".

The annual turnover of 635 industries from only three north Calcutta wards was found to be around Rs 500 crores. Nearly 90 per cent of these are working with only a trade licence. Needless to say, all these units use CMC's vats and drains to dispose of waste and effluent. The study has found that units in north Calcutta routinely generate 50,000 kg of metal dust and scraps per day. A number of these units do not even have no objection certificates from the PCB. The picture is marginally different in case of 700 units studied in Ward No. 37 in central Calcutta. Following the pilot project, the PCB has already cleared a full-scale industry mapping project for the Calcutta Metropolitan Area. The project will be completed in two years and is expected to cover 22,000 industries.

One way to prevent industrial mishaps in residential areas is to relocate the hazardous and polluting units. Owners agree in principle that their units should be located away from the city limits. "We have made up our mind on relocation subject to the availability of proper alternatives," R.K. Bubna, vice-president of the Indian Chamber of Manufacturers and Merchants Association (ICMMA), told SUNDAY.

Bubna also pointed out that the ICMMA was in touch with state urban affairs minister Ashok Bhattacharjee along with CMDA authorities and the state cottage and small-scale industry directorate to formulate and adopt a strategy for relocation. ICMMA sources feel that they stand to gain if their units

are relocated.

Cottage and small-scale industries department sources, however, don't foresee any significant development before the elections. "Relocation is always a hard option because of resource constraints," they point out. If the units cannot be shifted, then technical upgradation could be an option.

An option, one hopes, will be chosen before it's too late. •

Jayanta Basu/Calcutta

MADHYAPRADESH

All that gas

Fed up with false promises, Bhopal gas victims issue an ultimatum

It is back to election times. And since distress provides a good political handle, the gas victims of Bhopal have got another chance to highlight their demands. The lone organisation of gas victims — Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udhog Sangathan (BGPMUS) — has raised six questions and has asked all the political parties to clarify their stand on the issue.

"We give you 15 days' time and then we will decide our stand," says a spokesman of the organisation. In the last Lok Sabha polls, the BGPMUS had given a call for election boycott. There are about 3 to 3.5 lakh gas victims who are voters.

Says BGPMUS convener Abdool Jabbar, "Since December 1984, after the Bhopal gas disaster, successive govern-

But there was confusion as to what these explosives were. Some said it was the good-old RDX. But the police were not so sure. Later, forensic experts identified these to be a mixture of ammonium nitrate mixed with fuel oil (AMFO).

Also found in the boxes was the 8 July copy of *Inquilab*, POWDER KEG: explosives found at Sealdah station



a daily published from Bangladesh. In all, there were 14.5 kg of explosive. Though not as powerful as RDX, the AMFO consignment found at Sealdah was enough to blow up the entire station. As usual, the police was tight-lipped. "I am not going to speculate at this point of time. All I can tell you is that the event has wide implications," said S.R. Das, deputy inspector-general, Government Railway Police (GRP), inside whose jurisdiction the haul was made.

Das could not have been more prophetic. Suddenly, bombs and explosives were being found with alarming frequency all over West Bengal, mainly from the north Bengal districts. Immediately before Sealdah, AMFO explosives were found at Phoolbari in the Jalpaiguri district on 14 August and also at Hasnabad in the North 24 Parganas district on 15 August. And all these discoveries pointed to Bangladesh as transit or sourcing point.

The authorities have squarely blamed the ISI for turning West Bengal into a hotbed of subversive activities. Intelligence sources, however, are not so categorical. Some suggest that the Sealdah explosives episode was contrived. They point out that while the bomb was not assembled, the planting of a Bangladeshi daily newspaper was a giveaway. Others say that the bomb was in transit to north India.

And as speculation and counter-speculations go on, the state is in the grip of a security alert. •

Pradip Sanyal/Calcutta

Wait and watch

Doordarshan's news channel makes an impressive beginning

Doordarshan launched its all-new news and current affairs channel on the last Independence Day of the millennium right on target. Information and broadcasting minister Pramod Mahajan dismissed all protests from some Prasar Bharati board members, notably litterateur Rajendra Yadav and historian Romilla Thapar, who felt that the idea was good but the timing was bad, and did the deed.

Mahajan knows better. With the polls right around the corner, the timing couldn't be better, even with the Election Commission keeping an eagle eye on the proceedings and the staff of the news channel funnelling information on poll-related stories to the Commission.

The national broadcaster may do its best in keeping out bias. But that's not good enough with the work culture which Doordarshan has been steeped in: it has always listened to the master's voice. So fine, it may give footage to Soniaji as she airdashes between her twin constituencies Bellary and Amethi, but it will ensure that Sushmaji gets



PERFECT TIMING: Pramod Mahajan

equal, if not more, exposure. And of course, it will see to it that Atalji is never far from the camera's eye.

It is easy to dismiss the network's programming as routinely middling-to-poor. But no one, not even the most class conscious MNC can ignore its reach. In other words, it means that if your programme appears on DD1, you can be accessed by a whopping 80 per cent of India. The satellites, by comparison, fight for at best 20 to 30 per cent. Can't really blame Mr Mahajan for conjuring up a news channel at an opportune moment, can we?

And there are indications that at least in the run-up to the elections, the fledgling DD News channel may be worthy of your attention. At the time of writing, it has been five days since its inception and I have found *Talk Back* really interesting. In a late-night edition, Karan Thapar monitored a heated discussion between Arun Shourie and Kapil Sibal on the respective stands of the BJP and the Congress on various issues. It was free, frank and forthright, and best of all, fiery. •



THE TRAUMA CONTINUES: file picture of a BGP MUS rally

ments in the state have been ignoring vital issues of importance related to gas victims." And what are these issues?

There is no research-based medical treatment of the victims of Bhopal, points out the BGP MUS. Since 1985, the patients are being given symptomatic treatment. Cases of lung cancer, tuberculosis and other ailments afflicting the eye and the respiratory system are on the rise and the representatives of Bhopal Lok Sabha are keeping mum, allege the victims. They also allege that there was a conspiracy against the gas victims. It has been pointed out that there was no research on the possible long-term affects of the tragedy and the authorities wanted to show that everything was normal and under control. "We want a research-based treatment. They should also clarify whether they support the lifetime pension given to the handicapped and the seriously ill," demands some of the people.

Among other demands raised by the BGP MUS is the extradition of Warren Anderson, the then chairman of Union Carbide. "All political parties have forgotten the issue. They should tell us whether the killers should be punished or not," says a BGP MUS representative. Another important demand raised by the gas victims' organisation is the presence of hazardous waste in the factory premises. Around 4,000 metric tonnes of chemicals are still lying in the premises and polluting the drinking water in the area. More than 10,000 people are forced to drink this contaminated water.

Also included in the demand is the question of socio-economic rehabilitation of the victims. Rs 125 crores have already been spent and the result is a big zero. "What step will the future representative of Bhopal in Lok Sabha take regarding the issue of rehabilitation," is the question doing the rounds. The BGP MUS also wants a memorial built in the memory of the worst-ever industrial disaster. "We have been raising this demand for a long time. The memorial can be built on the 40 acre land available near the Carbide plant. Political parties must clarify their stand on the issue."

The organisation now wants the remaining amount meant for relief to be used sensibly. In view of the rampant corruption, the BGP MUS has demanded that half the amount (which comes to about Rs 500 crore) be distributed among the victims. It has urged the government to use the other half as a fixed corpus to run the rehabilitation programmes.

The organisation of gas victims has given a 15-day ultimatum. "We will decide our course of action after we get their reaction," says Jabbar. And if one can take a lesson from the past, the reaction will never come. •

Deshdeep Saxena/Bhopal



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 29 AUGUST, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

You are likely to be in the mood for conversation and expressing your thoughts and feelings. You are likely to communicate in a lucid and entertaining manner. People may be so taken with what you have to say and the way you say it, that new acquaintances and firm friendships are formed.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

You may have a leadership role to play in group events and activities. Your current form should also allow you to win the upper hand in business or financial negotiations. Romance that seemed to be on its last leg may not in fact be over. You may be asked out to dinner, a party or a theater.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

It is a starred week for discussing important financial issues behind closed doors. Lucrative deals can be forged. But it is advisable to keep the terms of such agreements to yourself or trusted associates. You should give love affairs another chance. Try to forgive, forget and start again.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

You are advised to steer clear of borrowing money, especially if this is intended to finance business ventures. These are best left alone if you do not have the capital in hand with which to fund them. Spouses and romantic partners may be in a possessive mood.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

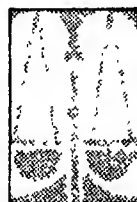
You may for once be surprised to find yourself overtaken by your own emotional responses. The remarks of others may cut you to the quick. In business, you should be more hard-headed than you usually are. Romance can be difficult. Maintain a more neutral and detached manner in decision-making.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

Developments in your love-life can be on cloud nine. All your worries may now melt away just by thinking about someone you love or have recently met. Say nothing that could hurt the feelings of friends. Business financial mistakes or losses may have to be made good from your personal resources.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

It would be a mistake to take money matters for granted in close relationships. Cash can all too easily become a bone of contention between mates or spouses. Do not assume that friends, however well-off, are intending to foot the bill. You could be barking up the wrong tree in investigative work.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

Romance can have a revitalizing effect on the rest of your life. This will enable you to face career affairs with new energy. Try talking over problems and concerns with loved ones. They can help to bring some order into chaotic situations. There will be no health problems or shortage of energy.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

It seems that the amount of time you are devoting to other interests rather than your love life, is upsetting your dear ones. You should strike a fairer balance between ambitions and close relationships. Be open to new business proposals. Lucrative offers may come now from unlikely sources.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

The best way to avoid financial arguments is to come to a clear agreement before anything is undertaken. Events may not go according to plan or expectations, but by keeping on your toes, you will be able to snap up new opportunities and quickly spot openings.

Patriot games

■ Kapil Dev announced that he thought it was anti-national to play cricket with Pakistan. But was this done at the behest of someone?

The Sahara group's com-



Kapil Dev: playing to someone else's tune?

petitors say yes, it was. Their theory is that Dev was egged on to make this statement so that the Sahara group, which is currently cash-strapped, would have an excuse to call off the Sahara Cup to be played at Toronto, Canada.

So Dev obliged and the match was called off.

HEARD IN BOMBAY

Subhash Chandra's problem is, he's suffering from an attack of Zee-no phobia.

A STAR TV INSIDER ABOUT THE COURT BATTLE BETWEEN ZEE TV CHIEF SUBHASH GOYAL AND STAR TV OWNER RUPERT MURDOCH OVER STAR'S BROADCAST OF ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMMES IN HINDI

What a joke!

■ Pepsi is known for imaginative marketing. But surely this is excessive?

Some months ago, Delhi's maximum security Tihar Jail got a novel offer from Pepsi. The poor prisoners, said Pepsi executives, have to sweat it out while they carry out their sentence, so why not put up a (paid, of course) Pepsi fountain in the jail so that they have access to the *dil mange more* drink?

Tihar Jail officials heard



Tihar Jail: take a break

them out and proposed silkily whether Pepsi would like to negotiate with McDo-

nald's to offer jail inmates McBurgers also, while they were about it? What about the south Indian inmates who pined for *dosa* and *utthapams*? And as the jail had many European prisoners, would a mobile pizza service also be in order?

When it occurred to the executives that the jail officials were joking they left the place

Secretary's secret

■ Is Shakti Sinha, the PS to Prime Minister, leaving the PMO?

Indications are that Sinha will go to Washington as executive secretary to the executive director, World Bank, B.P. Singh, as soon as elections in India are over.

Sinha had asked to be moved six months ago. Before that he was offered a posting in India's high commission



Shakti Sinha: off to the US?

in London, which he had turned down.

So the PM will need another PS? The hunt is on. •

CHECK-LIST

Economic policy: who is saying what

■ **Fiscal deficit:** The NDA only promises to control the fiscal and revenue deficit. The Congress promises to stabilise it at four per cent of the GDP, with the additional vow of phasing out the revenue deficit altogether in the next three or four years

■ **Infrastructure:** The NDA says its emphasis will be on energy and transport. It will restructure the state electricity boards and tourism development will be a core activity

■ **Financial sector:** The Congress says it will make the insurance regulatory and development authority a statutory structure and use this to generate funds for infrastructure. It is committed to bringing down the NPAs of banks to no more than three to four per cent of their total assets in the next two years. The NDA says it will set up an independent insurance regulatory authority and rationalise NPAs of banks.

■ **Trade policy:** The Congress will make it easier for small-scale industry exporters to export commodities. The NDA has listed all the things that it has done but nothing that it will do in future

ELECTION DIARY

HEARD AT 11 ASHOK ROAD

Now that the CPM has its man in power, it should stop attacking us

A BJP WORKER FROM KERALA REFERRING TO THE FACT THAT INDIA HAD A CARETAKER PRIME MINISTER (CPM) IN ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE

The son of the soil, **Deve Gowda**, woke up last week to realise that he didn't know how to drive a tractor, the symbol of his party.

Despite his 'poor farmer' refrain, this time he also behaved like an absolutely ignorant farmer. First he got



Deve Gowda: on a one-way street

himself a learner's licence after a crash course on tractor driving. Then he went ahead with his mission by driving the tractor without taking the driving test. And as if that was not enough, he was driving on a one-way street, parked outside the Annamalai Temple in Bangalore to start his election campaign.

He has now been sued for not only violating traffic rules which led to a major road but also acquiring a learner's licence without going through a driving test.

But, handing all this shouldn't be a problem for Gowda. Like a nightmare he can just sleep it off.

Start of smearing

The DMK chief **M. Karunanidhi** started following an auspicious day to start his campaign? Of late DMK men have started smearing their foreheads with sandalwood paste, going to their favourite deity before filing their nomination papers.

Karunanidhi has started wearing a yellow shawl after his 1996 Assembly election comeback (Annadurai must be turning in his grave because he and all Dravidian leaders used to wear black shawls).

For the 1999 election, Karunanidhi started his campaign only on 18 August, a day after the inauspicious



Karunanidhi: supernatural support

Adi month. He set off for his campaign only after the *Rahu kalam*.

All the top DMK leaders filed their nominations on 18 August, Wednesday, which is considered a good day. And at some places there was lighting of camphor and breaking of coconuts before Karunanidhi arrived, to ward off the evil eye.

Other ambitions

Controversial cop **Kiran Bedi** is on the verge of another controversy.

Bedi was apparently interested in contesting the Lok



Kiran Bedi: try again

Sabha elections and contacted the Congress, wishing to be considered as a candidate from East Delhi.

For reasons best known to it, the Congress said no to her nomination. So Bedi has temporarily abandoned the idea. But only temporarily, we hear. *

CHECK-LIST

Sons in the first list

■ **K. Muralidharan**: K. Karunakaran's son is contesting the Kozhikode seat despite having lost the last two elections. No one has objected to this — except Karunakaran's daughter Padmaja, who has been promised an Assembly seat in 2001.

■ **H.D. Kumaraswamy**: One of the first names to be declared in the JD(U) list. Obviously papa H.D. Deve Gowda had nothing to do with his son being one of the first to get a seat.

■ **Jagat Singh**: Father K. Natwar Singh has bowed out this time because of the doctor's orders. And has told voters in Bharatpur that son Jagat is just what the doctor ordered.

■ **Kamrajendra Singh**: Foreign minister Jaswant Singh's son, journalist turned politician, is trying out his luck for the first time from Barmer, Rajasthan.

Gender difference

Why was Uma Bharati's constituency changed and not Murlidhar Joshi's?

Bharati moved from Khajuraho to Bhopal, despite opposition in the BJP. At least one MP from an adjoining constituency had predicted gloomily that although the party's stated policy was not to allow candidates to shift, Bharati would get her own way.

Now the issue has gathered momentum. Joshi, who had been nursing Sultanpur, a constituency near his own Allahabad, had also petition-



Uma Bharati: everything's fair

ed the high command that he wanted to shift. He has visited Sultanpur at least 30 times during his tenure as central minister, inaugurating various things including a Navodaya Vidyalaya there.

An arrangement had been reached with the sitting candidate from Sultanpur, that he would be sent to the Rajya Sabha. So Joshi had tied everything up. But the party refused to consider his request for a shift because "it would become very difficult for us".

Now that Uma Bharati has been accommodated with-

HEARD IN CENTRAL HALL

...and then there was this man who was told he was getting a ticket. So when he went to collect the P Form, he was handed an envelope. Inside was a ticket — for a Delhi Transport Corporation bus to take him back to his village!

OLD-TIMERS EXCHANGING ELECTION STORIES

out any difficulty in a constituency of her choice, Joshi's supporters are naturally asking what the difficulty is.

Rewinding up

So the chairman of the Disinvestment Commission, G.V. Ramakrishna, has got yet another extension.

He has to be the most reluctant bureaucrat in public office. He has offered his resignation to different

governments at least twice. However, the term of the commission has been extended yet again and will now function till 30 November.

The commission has submitted 12 reports, most of them recommending that the majority of public sector institutions in India be privatised. The latest in the list is BHEL.

The cigar-chomping accretive Ramakrishna, earlier chief of SEBI, has a formidable reputation. It is not known whether the commis-

CHECK - LIST

Eager for berths: ministerial candidates waiting in the wings

■ **Shatrughan Sinha:** Waiting for his turn for nearly five years. Sees himself as a serious contender for the chief ministership of Bihar, if not a central ministership.

■ **Sanjay Singh:** Was expecting to be made a minister in the BJP's last government. Reckons he would have had a better chance of winning Amethi (against Sonia Gandhi) had he been a central minister. Anyway, has repulsed the Congress's overtures to him. If even after this the BJP doesn't make him a minister if it comes to power...

■ **Ajit Kumar Panja:** The last time around, the BJP didn't make Panja a minister because Mamata Banerjee decreed it so. This time, if he is not made a minister he will be justified in revolting against the Trinamul Congress.

■ **Arun Nehru:** Although he's only just joined the BJP, he's been in the queue for the last six years and it was the BJP's fault that it didn't let him in. So now it has got a chance; it can correct the error. Assuming he wins the election.

sion itself will be wound up or a new incumbent will be appointed.

Sulking seniors

Union home minister L.K. Advani's stewardship of the BJP has already run into rough weather.

Advani had his party's best interests in mind when he issued a directive to the BJP central office that till the



L.K. Advani: minding the camera

elections, only Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley should be fielded at press conferences. (This was before Swaraj filed her candidature for Bellary).

So the veterans — J.P. Mathur and Jana Krishna-murthy — who were briefing the press and appearing on television as representatives of their party, were told to stop what they were doing and make way for spokespersons who were 'TV-savvy', reportedly Advani's own phrase.

Naturally miffed, Mathur and others complained to the Prime Minister. Vajpayee is said to have told them that Advani's decision was final and he could not intervene.

So now the seniors in the party are sulking. •

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